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Asylum seekers in narrative action.

An exploration into the process of narration within the framework of asylum from the perspective of the claimants.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

When I first began exploring the role of personal narratives for selfhood I came across an analysis of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* which spurred a lot of reflection and ultimately led to my research question. In his introduction of Cavarero's book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and selfhood*, Kottman begins with a quote from the famous tragedy: "By a name I know not how to tell thee who I am" (2000, p. vii). The problem exposed by Romeo is how to represent himself – who he is – beyond his father's name which he inherits. It is a story that tells of an impossible relationship between two lovers for they come from enemy families. What makes their love impossible is that they are identified by means of their name which conceals their individuality. Kottman calls this the "tragedy of the name" for "[the name] is *indifferent* to the one who is named" (p. xxiv).

Kottman uses this story to illustrate the age old question which Cavarero broaches in her book: how can we know *who* a person is? How can we apprehend by means of words his or her individual uniqueness? Drawing from Arendt, Cavarero sets out to outline the problem by making the distinction between the *what* and the *who* of a person. The *what* refers to the attributes of a person, the qualities and qualifications that make him or her a human, a citizen, a member of a particular community or a particular type of person. These are characteristics that are common to others. The *who* of a person, on the contrary, reveals his or her individual singularity. This singularity cannot be named for it is unique. It is only through the person's story that this *who* is disclosed. In Arendt's words: "Who somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero – his biography, in other words" (Arendt, 1998, p. 186).

Coming back to the tragedy of the name, Kottman goes further by linking it to Butler's theory (Butler, 1997). According to Butler, the way a person is called in social life also produces the person's social existence. A name has material effects on the person's social existence by impacting what form it will take. However names or terms with which a person is confronted may not correspond to who he or she considers him/herself to be. "The name wields a linguistic power of constitution in ways that are indifferent to the one who bears the name" (Butler in Kottman, 2000, p. xix). Hence not only can a name conflict with an individual's self-conception, but it can also impact the person's life in concrete ways by socially constituting him or her. Narrating one's personal life story may be a means to overcome the vulnerability to naming by exposing one's uniqueness provided that the conditions for this story to emerge are present – that is another person ready to listen and to recognize the individual's uniqueness.

Departing from these rather abstract considerations about the role of narration for individual self-conception, I began drawing some parallels with the situation of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers (which is already a name) rely on their personal story to be recognized as refugees by the responsible

state. 'Refugee' as a name is socially constituted. It notably reflects the tendency in public discourses of receiving countries to conceive of the refugee experience as a "uniform condition" (M. Eastmond, 2007, p. 253), one which usually focuses on trauma (Marlowe, 2010). The name 'refugee' is also institutionalized as its definition is legally inscribed. To be recognized as refugees, asylum seekers notably have to fulfil the criteria of persecution. Hence they are often forced to represent themselves as victims to render their narrative compelling (Jeffers, 2008). Following from these observations we could postulate that asylum seekers are living a tragedy of the name, spurring numerous questions. What happens to individual's selfhood in the process of seeking asylum? Does the process of asylum seeking paradoxically overlook the individuality and uniqueness contained within a person's story? And if so what are the consequences for the asylum seekers themselves? It is such theoretical considerations and questionings that I decided to empirically explore in my research. However these are situated on a conceptual level hence in the rest of my introductory chapter I set out to delineate my research question in more concrete terms. This is followed by an elaboration of the sub-questions guiding my empirical research and how I set out to answer them.

1. Research topic

According to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugee (hereafter the Geneva Convention) signatory countries have the responsibility of protecting individuals that present a well-founded fear of persecution (Geneva Convention, 1951, CC 0.142.30). The text provides a definition of who is to be regarded as a refugee; what types of threats of persecution can be considered. This definition thus serves as a basis for signatory states' procedure for determining refugeehood. Asylum seekers most often rely solely on their story in order to demonstrate their fear of persecution (Millbank, 2009). How their story is assessed becomes a central issue as the decision which ensues will determine the future of the asylum seeker, whether they will be granted the permission to stay. Narration also plays a central role for asylum seekers in order to make sense out of radical change. Indeed, the displacement they undergo engenders discontinuities within their everyday lives thereby requiring new interpretations of their experiences in order to "make sense of the disruptive change" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 251). Recently, several studies have provided critical examinations of procedures of refugee determination from a legal perspective focusing particularly on credibility assessments (Good, 2009; Kagan, 2003; Macklin, 1998; Millbank, 2009). There has been less attention on understanding the processes of narration and perspectives on the procedure of asylum seekers. However to understand practices of recognition and identification it is essential to better understand how asylum seekers tell their stories. This research thus delves into the question: How do individuals

engage in the process of narrating their life as asylum seekers? It requires not only exploring self-narrative of asylum claimants but also their conceptions, experience and knowledge of notions of refugeehood, exile, asylum and the procedure itself. It is thus necessary to elaborate in greater detail the sub-questions which are encompassed within this initial interrogation (Burki, 2013).

2. Research questions

Asylum narratives are stories that are produced in a specific context. They respond to the administrative requirement of providing proof of one's refugeehood. These narratives are hence recounted in accordance to the asylum seekers' understanding of how the flow of events and actions led to their present situation and how they relate to their claim. Central in the way they reconstruct their story is their conception of what a refugee is and what events or circumstances in their life constitute them as such. Usually, the knowledge asylum seekers hold of the procedure in the country of application as well as the specific legal definition of refugee (included for example in the 1951 Geneva convention) is very imprecise even when the procedure is underway (Zimmermann, 2010). Moreover, the self-established justifications for going to Europe may have been very different at the moment of departure than once their asylum application has been set off. Hence the aim of this research is to understand the link between the asylum seeker's representation of the procedure and how they construct their story in relation to these representations. Research questions notably include: How do asylum seekers structure their stories? Particular focus here is on structure (plot), themes and self-presentation in the story. How do asylum seekers' representations of "asylum", "refugee", "the asylum procedure" contribute in structuring their story? How do they construe agency and constraints in their story? In order to answer these questions several interviews will be conducted with asylum seekers focusing on their life story and their representations of asylum.

To better understand issues related to the asylum seekers process of narration, particularly in relation to the administrative procedure and auditions, interviews were conducted with legal case workers. These interviews also sought to explore whether and how a professional legal support contributes to the process of asylum seekers' narration. Research questions with regard to these interviews included notably: How do legal case workers help asylum seekers shape their narrative for the administrative procedure? What common difficulties legal case workers are confronted with when apprehending the stories of asylum seekers?

3. Outline

The exploration of the central question – how do individuals engage in the process of narrating their life as asylum seekers – is set out in six chapters. Having briefly outlined the main issue at hand in the

first chapter, the second chapter elaborates more precisely on the constituents of the question. This begins in a first part by the exposition of narrative identity, the central concept in the research, which serves as the theoretical framework. In the second part the asylum framework is elaborated in more detail including the specificities of the asylum procedure and legislation. Having outlined both the concept of narrative identity and the framework of asylum a first set of considerations are then discussed in the third part which relate to the research question. These concern aspects of narrative inequality which are drawn from the academic literature and involve issues of interpretation and questions linked to recognition. The third chapter outlines the main theoretical line underlining the choice of methodology, followed by a depiction of the more specific methods employed. The fourth chapter presents the results and is divided into two parts. In the first part the narratives of the asylum seekers interviewed are presented and analyzed, two of which are discussed in more depth. The second part presents the analysis of the interviews with the legal caseworkers. The fifth chapter is also divided into two. The first part presents a transversal comparison between the asylum seekers' narratives along the lines of the plot, themes, aim of the stories and self-conception. The second part focuses on a series of observations which can be drawn from the interviews with the asylum seekers, the legal caseworkers and the literature. The sixth chapter sets out to present some concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II: NARRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF ASYLUM

1. Narrative identity

The following section sets out to present the concept of narrative identity. The concept of narrative alone is first outlined. This enables to discuss how the concept of narrative contributes to that of identity. Then the various elements constituting narrative identity are each explored including 'narrative as representation', 'time and coherence', 'narrative and space', and 'narrative and relationality'.

1.1 Narrative

Before diving into an account of narrative identity it is necessary to spell out the main lines of the concept of narrative alone. This concept has somewhat become blurry due to its recent wide and sometimes indiscriminate use in the social sciences and humanities. Indeed the 'narrative turn' beginning in the 1980s spurred a renewal of interest in this concept across a wide range of disciplines (Herman, Jahn, & Ryan, 2005). Each discipline provides its own range of meanings adding onto the confusion (Hazel, 2007). In its most basic definition it is simply an account of events. However, as

highlighted by Polkinghorne (1995, p. 6) it has been stretched to signify all kinds of prosaic discourse, that is any statements distinguished from poetry. In other words narrative has been extended to include any qualitative data in the form of natural speech. Narrative as a concept however becomes useful when its meaning is narrowed down and clearly specified, a challenge which will henceforth be undertaken.

Here narrative is understood as story and the focus is on narrative of personal experience. In Ochs and Capps' (1996) simple words it refers to "framings of a sequence of actual or possible life events" (p. 19). Chase (2011) provides a longer definition, but which encompasses the essential elements that constitute this concept: "(...) meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (p. 421). This definition notably highlights that the components of the story, the events and experiences, acquire meaning in the context of the story as a whole (Elliott, 2005). Storytelling is hence part of a process whereby experiences acquire meaning. This definition also put an emphasis on "consequences of actions and events over time". The connections between events and their consequences are notably achieved through the sequencing of actions. Sequencing enables to build causal relations between temporally distinct episodes. This demonstrates the explanatory power of narrative. The thematic lines along with the causal relations build the structure of the story. In other words the plot (Polletta & Chen, 2011). The two elements outlined so far – meaning-making and sequencing – are well put forwards in the definition provided by Eastmond (2007): "Put simply, narrative is a form in which activities and events are described as having a meaningful and coherent order, imposing on reality a unity which it does not inherently possess" (p. 250). Although these features are the basics of narrative, others will be gradually presented in the next section on narrative identity.

1.2 Narrative identity

The concept of narrative can be combined with that of identity ('narrative identity') in order to denote the storying of the self. However not all authors choose to use this concept preferring for example 'life story' (Linde, 1993) or 'personal narrative' (Ochs & Capps, 1996; Riessman, 2002). This may be due in part to the diversity of disciplines which broach the topic of the narration of the self. It may also be an attempt to take a distance from the concept of identity which has become too ambiguous and lost its theoretical power due to its over-use not only in academics but also in political discourses and everyday life (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). I have nonetheless chosen to use the concept of narrative identity because it encompasses a great number of theoretical

considerations useful in delineating my research questions and directing certain aspects of the methodology and analysis, aspects which will later be detailed. The following section does not provide a single definition for this concept but rather delineates its theoretical components. Before doing so however it is important to highlight some of the main criticisms that have been voiced against the concept of identity. This enables to understand how the concept of narrative improves the concept of identity alone.

The concept of *narrative* identity enables to overcome the threat of essentialism of the concept of identity alone. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have rightly identified the concept of identity as problematic. Amongst the various criticisms, they particularly highlight the risks of reification when the practical usages of the term are conflated with its analytical purposes. The practical employment on the one hand refers to the ways in which individuals apply the term in everyday life or for political purposes. The analytical use on the other hand serves specifically to understand individuals and their actions. The danger of reification refers to the risk of apprehending identity or certain forms of identity (ex: race and gender) as something fixed, ahistorical and universal. Indeed when the language of politics is uncritically adopted for analytical purposes, the categories involved are taken for granted rendering them fixed and unquestionable. The diverse and particularistic world becomes simplified and general. Brubaker and Cooper thus suggest rather conceiving of identity as a process which may become crystallized at certain moments in time but always remain variable. Somers (1994) presents a similar criticism of the concept of identity. Her critique focuses mainly on the way recent politics of identity have created new forms of “totalizing fictions” (p. 610). She highlights that these have been adopted and reified by identity-theory. This is a clear example of the conflation of practical and analytical employments of the term. The problem remains the same: essential, pre-political categories are taken as the basis for analysis thereby ignoring the historicity and variable character of these very categories. The solution she suggests is the one chosen in this research, which is to incorporate the “destabilizing dimensions of time, space and relationality” central in the concept of narrative (p. 606). These three dimensions will henceforth be explored. However the role of narrative as a form of representation will first be presented (paragraph from Burki, 2013).

1.2.1 Narrative as representation

In the conception of narrative identity *narrative* is a form of representation of the self. It is a form of representation in the sense that it provides a means to access experience and how experience is expressed. This notion takes root from phenomenology’s ontology which posits that we cannot access an essence of things but only how we experience them. Eastmond (2007) explains well this

link with phenomenology by suggesting to analytically distinguish between four 'layers' of life. There is first "life as lived", that is the events and situations which constitute our life. There is then "life as experienced", that is the ascription of meaning to these events and situations according to what we have previously experienced and our cultural repertoires. Following this, there is "life as told", how we tell about our experience in specific situations or in other words how we represent experience. To these three we can add a fourth level which refers to how the researcher interprets and represents the life story: "life as text" (p. 249). Life in this view can only be accessed through its representation in specific contexts. Narrative analysis in this regard thus aims at understanding human experience through the means of expression employed by the narrator.

Ochs & Capps (1996) take the argument a step further by suggesting that narrative is not only the sole means by which *others* can have access to a particular individual's experience but also "an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness" (p. 21). According to this logic personal experience can also only be known by the individual herself when it is given a form notably in the shape of narrative. This approach highlights the overlap between the three first layers of life outlined above: "life as lived", "life as experienced" and "life as told". Indeed, it suggests that consciousness of experience comes by attributing meaning and that meaning of experience takes the form of narrative. The minute we become aware of an experience and express this experience it takes a storied form. From this perspective narratives are versions of reality. Bruner's (1991) theory takes a similar stance towards narrative (although it focuses more on modes of knowing rather than consciousness). Indeed according to him our experience and memory are mainly organized in the form of narrative. Moreover he highlights an interesting point by arguing that our experience is not only organised in the form of narrative, but that this very form – the narrative that we provide – shapes the experience itself. There is therefore a dynamic, two-way interplay between experience and narrative.

The concept of narrative identity points to a certain creativity and agency of the individual (Ritivoi, 2009), the agency to create one's own story and hence create oneself. One of the main ways this capacity is made apparent is through the individual's selection of events and how they are arranged to form the plot. It is individual's self-reflexivity and capacity for evaluation which enables to select amongst the infinite numbers of events, experiences, people that constitute everyday life (Somers, 1994). Moreover, when arranged into a narrative configuration different events and experiences acquire various relative importance and their meaning depends on the whole unit of the story (Hazel, 2007). This leads to two observations concerning personal narratives. First each individual story told in a particular setting only reflects partial selves. "Each telling of a narrative situated in time and space engages only facets of a narrator's [...] selfhood in that it evokes only

certain memories, concerns and expectations” (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 22). Hence in each occasion of telling we are given the opportunity for a “fragmented self-understanding” (p. 21). The form the story takes depends on the context, who it is told for, for what purpose, with what expectations and so forth. This leads to the second observation: Narratives provide explanations, goals and intentions, beliefs, desires, and values of the actor. In Bruner’s words stories provide an account of the “intentional state” of the individual (1991, p. 7). Of course events and actions are never fully determined by the intentional state but it provides a basis for understanding why the character acted as she did.

The individual’s agency however is framed by the resources at hand, the narrative competence. Basing himself on Hymes, Blommaert makes an accurate remark: “that ‘making sense’ often, concretely, is narrowed to ‘making sense in particular ways’, using very specific linguistic, stylistic and generic resources” (Blommaert, 2006b, p. 241). The narrative competence of an individual depends on her ‘cultural toolkit’ which is constituted by cultural products such as language and other symbolic systems (Bruner, 1991). This will be explored in more depth in the section on ‘narrative and space’. However it is important to note already that a narrator is like a painter who can transmit what he wants using the material and techniques that are available to him. As we shall later see, this is the most basic framing of the narrative agency. Other elements come into play that also shape the way the story is told such as the contextual features of telling (environment, audience, expectations, power relations...etc.). As highlighted by Somers (1994) narrative thus strikes a balance between agency and structure, a balance that can shift weight from one or the other depending on the circumstances.

1.2.2 Time and coherence

Interestingly sociology has largely explored conceptions of the self with regards to relationships, how individuals acquire their sense of identity with respect to their social situatedness. However, consequences on identity of individuals’ situatedness in time has been much less discussed (Ezzy, 1998). Time poses a particular challenge to identity. How do we recognise ourselves as the same person than in the past? How do we reconcile our past with our present and project ourselves in the future? Moreover, it has been mentioned that each time we tell our story we produce partial and fragmented selves. This however poses an issue: How are all of these ‘partial selves’ reconciled to create a coherent and unified self? Paul Ricoeur has most notably undertaken the challenge of answering such questions in his three volume work ‘Time and Narrative’ (Ricoeur, 1984). Aspects of his theory will henceforth be outlined.

Ricoeur makes two sets of distinctions that are useful to understand how narrative contributes in creating a coherent and temporally unified self. The first distinction is between two experiences of time: cosmological and phenomenological. Cosmological time refers to the mechanical passing of time – the linear succession of minutes, hours and days. Our existence from birth to death is situated within a stretch of this cosmological timespan. Phenomenological time is time as experienced. It is concerned with the interplay between past and present and is also future-oriented. Indeed as we are practical beings we also conceive of ourselves in terms of what we are to become giving our self-consciousness a temporal and future-oriented character (Atkins, 2004). In the phenomenological form, time can take on variable velocity or be distinguished hierarchically. Certain expressions in everyday language reflect this phenomenological time, for example ‘racing against time’, ‘time hangs heavy’, ‘wasting time’, ‘killing time’, ‘making time’...etc. Narrative incorporates both cosmological time and phenomenological time (Atkins, 2004; Teichert, 2004).

The second distinction suggested by Ricoeur differentiates ‘identity as sameness’ (*idem*) and ‘identity as selfhood’ (*ipse*). Identity as sameness is concerned with the question of reidentification. What characteristics or features of an individual show enough continuity enabling to identify a person at different occasions? These characteristics must present certain stability through time in order for others to recognise a person at different moments in time and include for example physical features or habits. Identity as selfhood on the other hand focuses on aspects that are not (externally) re-identifiable such as experience. The challenge here is to create continuity across time out of elements that constitute an individual’s subjective experience of their personal history. This continuity is achieved through the narrative (Teichert, 2004). The narrative enables to create unity and coherence out of the disparate experiences of life. In other words it is a kind of psychological continuity that can only be articulated through the narrative because it is concerned with the first-person (i.e. I, me) (Atkins, 2004).

So we are capable through our narratives of creating a sense of unity and coherence that demonstrates a temporal continuity. But the second question remains: How do we create coherence between the numerous narratives we tell, which are themselves temporally situated and dependent on the context? The answer to this question is more ambiguous. Indeed as both Linde (1993) and Ochs & Capps (1996) have noted, there can be several, co-existing notions of the self, or explanations of experience, or of why we acted as we did. However, narratives can also be conceived as ways to bridge these incoherencies. Usually when we become aware of contradictions within ourselves we tend to seek for an explanation and this explanation comes in the form of a narrative. By incorporating time, the narrative enables to adjust the multiplicity of situated selves into a coherent self in the present. Hence “we use narrative as a tool for probing and forging connections between

our unstable, situated selves” (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 29). When individuals present difficulties in creating coherence it is usually identified as a psychological or personality disorder. It can notably occur after traumatic events when individuals become incapable of integrating the devastating episodes into their life story, and sense of past self but which nevertheless invade their present life and create fragmented memories or flashbacks. Certain therapeutic interventions are concerned with helping individuals create coherent and acceptable narratives out of such traumatic events (Eastmond, 1996).

1.2.3 Narrative and space

Narratives are situated within a geographical and social positioning. It has already been mentioned that stories require a cultural ‘toolkit’ that is shared with others. This includes of course language but also common norms, expectations, ideas about what is rational and moral, appropriate, aesthetic (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Meaning that emerges in the narrative depends on the cultural and moral world in which the individual is situated, her localized position (Eastmond, 2007, p. 252). The cultural stock of plots and the normative values associated with them is for example one of the elements of the toolkit from which individuals draw to create meaning (Polletta & Chen, 2011). Personal narratives are thus a means to access and understand social reality. For example they can provide a more in-depth understanding of how the social meaning of exile is constructed from different positions (M. Eastmond, 2007). Typically in the face of radical change an individual will have to renegotiate understandings of exile as its meaning is most probably different before and after migration. This is not only a consequence of the individual’s experience of moving, but also because the meaning of such notions can be radically different in different geographical locations. However, geographical location is not the only type of social positioning which shapes meaning. Others can include for example social class, age or gender of the person. However the term cultural *toolkit* is used because individuals don’t simply reproduce cultural plots and norms. They can conform or transgress ‘cultural’ narratives (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Hence personal narratives enable to explore the continuities and discontinuities between culture and personal experience (M. Eastmond, 2007).

1.2.4 Narrative and relationality

As often noticed, a story requires a public (at least imagined): “A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller” (Benjamin, 1968, p.99). Storytelling is thus a relational activity insofar as it is generally produced within an interaction with others. This leads to several considerations concerning the way in which we apprehend narratives.

To begin with, narratives may be conceived as a form of performance in which we represent our identity. This is a perspective most notably taken up by Riessman (2002) who focuses her analysis

on the performative aspects of narrative. Performance points not only to how individuals are positioned within a socio-cultural matrix but how they position *themselves* with regards to the audience. Narrators can for example position themselves as the instigators of action or on the contrary the victims of a circumstance depending on the image they want to reflect.

The concept of performance leads us to a second consideration: close attention to the context in which the narrative was elicited is essential. This is crucial not only for studies focusing on narratives but for most types of qualitative research as the context of the research interview also impacts what is told. Bruner (1991) highlights some of the questions that arise when apprehending the conditions of telling rather than what is told. First there is the issue of intention. Why is the story told, when and how? Why is it interpreted in a certain way by the listener who also has an intentional stance? The second is the question of the background knowledge of both narrator and interlocutor and how each interprets the background knowledge of the other. How will a narrator tell a story and the listener interpret it according to what each presupposes the knowledge of the other is? Bruner (1991) provides a good example which highlights both sets of questions: in institutionalized legal situations it is taken for granted that the “knowledge register” of the client who tells the story in “life talk” is not the same than the lawyer who listens to it in “law talk” (p. 11). The lawyer then provides advice about the litigation rather than life.

This leads us to the third consideration on the relationality of narrative production: interpretation. Here again Bruner (1991) provides a useful entry point for discussion by apprehending the question of hermeneutics inherent to the narrative process. The term hermeneutics implies that there is a text – in this case a story that is produced within an interaction – and henceforth a certain meaning expressed *through* the story and a meaning extracted *from* the story (p.7). Within an interaction each participant attempts to understand the meaning which the other is communicating, hence both are involved in a process of negotiation. Moreover, teller and listener are context sensitive, they are aware of the circumstances in which the story is told and how meaning may relate to these circumstances. Linde (1993) explains this well by referring to a study on storytelling performance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1975). Although the study focuses on storytelling in the folkloric sense, the following remark is equally applicable to narratives of the self: “they are told with reference to a particular context of current activities and that they gain their relevance by the connection their hearers draw between their content and the circumstances of their telling (p.29)”. However it does not result that understanding the meaning of a story is a constant interpretative struggle. A good storyteller will formulate his narrative to seem self-evident, either by momentarily seducing the listener into making a single interpretation or by proposing a narrative that fits the convention so well that the listener assigns to it an “automatic interpretative routine” (Bruner, 1991,

p. 10). However if the listener is suspicious about the facts or motives of the narrator then she may become “hermeneutically alert” (ibid.). The listener will for example become more attentive to clues within the narrative that may point to ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’. As we shall later see asylum seekers typically have to tell their narratives in a context in which listeners are highly hermeneutically alert to what may indicate their story to be right or wrong. Having outlined the role of relationality in the telling of narratives we can conclude with the observation that listeners also partially hold an author role in the making of a narrative (Ochs & Capps, 1996). This can be for example by shaping the circumstances and intentions of the telling or by asking questions concerning the meaning of the story.

2. The asylum framework

How do individuals engage in the process of narration as asylum seekers? Central in this question is the term ‘asylum seeker’. Hence in order to provide an answer it is necessary to understand what an asylum seeker is and what it may involve for a person to be defined as such. An asylum seeker is first an administrative category that defines the legal status of a person who is claiming for asylum – asking for protection in another state than his own where he or she fears persecution. It is thus an externally imposed legal label. Asylum seekers undergo a national asylum procedure to determine whether they can qualify for protection. When a person is attributed the protection of the state he or she is attributed the status of refugee hence the evaluation of a person’s claim is made on the basis of the refugee definition. The legal notions of the asylum seeker and the refugee must be clearly distinguished: an asylum seeker is a person asking to be recognized as a refugee. This chapter aims at outlining the asylum framework, which includes the legal structure but also public representations particularly within politics and media. These affect policies and the ways in which asylum seekers are apprehended shaping in turn the framework within which the individuals concerned experience and narrate these experiences. Hence in outlining the framework certain considerations concerning the social and political context in which the laws or agreements are established are also mentioned.

The legal framework is established on different levels as both international and European agreements are incorporated into the Swiss legislation. The chapter is thus structured to move from broader international regulations towards the more specific Swiss asylum procedure. All of the legal documents including the international conventions, agreements and regulations are referred to as they appear in the Swiss classified compilation (abbreviated as CC). The first section will begin by providing the definition of refugee which is incorporated in the Swiss legislation and the context in which this definition was established. The principle of non-refoulement will also be briefly outlined as it is the basis for the right of presence of an asylum seeker on a state’s territory, which provides the

right to access a due process. The second section outlines the attempt of European states to establish a common asylum system. Pertinent to understand the asylum seekers' stories is the Dublin Regulation as it determines the state responsible for the individual's claim thereby providing territorial limits to their claim. Here it is particularly relevant to draw attention to the shortcomings of this regulation as it directly affects the experience of asylum seekers. The third section focuses on the general tendency of reforming legislations. Interesting here is to highlight the role of public discourses in contributing to the legislative changes. These are relevant because they reveal certain perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees, which have an impact on the asylum seekers themselves. The fourth section outlines the general steps of the procedure and the main lines along which the stories are assessed. This is necessary in order to understand certain aspects of the story recounted by the asylum seekers and the contexts in which this story is told. The procedure that was in effect during my interviews (between January 2013 and June 2014) will thus be outlined in general lines. The focus will be on the most common steps, which the participants of the research were undergoing.

2.1 The refugee definition

The basis for the current legislation in most European countries, including Switzerland, was set in the Geneva Convention which took place in 1951. The convention defines who is a refugee, what their rights are and the legal obligations of states towards them. In 1967 a protocol was added to the Convention removing the geographical and temporal limitations (CC 0.142.301). The scope of the Convention is thereby extended to include not only Europe but the rest of the world too and is no longer limited to events prior 1951. The first article of the Geneva Convention establishes the definition of a refugee as a person whom:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

The main novelty of this definition resides in the individual character it attributes to the notion of refugee. The persecution must be directed at the person herself and being in danger due to generalized violence is not considered sufficient in order to be recognized as a refugee. This orientation in the definition can be notably understood in the context of the Cold War whence receiving refugees fleeing the communist block takes on political stakes (Piguet, 2009). As we shall later see, the global socio-political context has since then considerably changed and with it the

connotation of refugeehood and asylum. However the definition in the Convention was incorporated practically word for word in many European states' legislations and has undergone no significant modification. It thereby continues to play a relevant role in shaping the asylum policies and procedures. In the Swiss legislation definition of refugee is presented in art. 3 of the Asylum Act (AsyIA, 1998, CC 142.31).

At the basis of all the European states' jurisdiction on asylum lies a clause in the Geneva Convention which has become a peremptory norm (no derogation is permitted): the principle of non-refoulement. This principle is contained in Article 33 of the Geneva Convention.

No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

This reasoning is based on the notion that a State is breaching the article if removing someone from its territory leads this person towards a situation of torture, inhuman treatment or punishment (Vermeulen, 1998). This principle of non-refoulement implies that each case must be examined individually before a person is expelled from the territory. Therefore each person entering a signatory country has the right to file an asylum application, undergo a due process, and cannot be forcibly removed from the state's territory so long as the case is pending. Once the individual has filed an asylum request he or she is referred to as an asylum seeker till a decision falls concerning his or her application. In Switzerland the right to reside in the country till the end of the procedure is determined by the article 42 of the Asylum Act.

2.2 Attempt towards a common asylum system

In Europe there has been an attempt towards a common asylum system leading to several agreements and conventions (European Commission Migration and Home Affairs, 2014). The most notable agreement commonly known as the Dublin regulations (EC 343/2003) concluded with Switzerland in 2004 (*Agreement relating to the Dublin/Eurodac regulations*, 2004, CC 0.142.392.68) establishes criteria to determine which member state is responsible for an asylum claim. It has been set as the first country through which an asylum seeker enters the territory of the European Union. This agreement is applied notably by means of Eurodac, a database which collects biometric information (usually the fingerprint) of asylum seekers and migrants when they enter the European territory. However, although there is technically a shared responsibility, each country has its own legislation and procedure. This points to a common paradox in European countries whereby there is an attempt on the one hand to harmonize certain legislation, and on the other hand a countervailing attempt of states to maintain their sovereignty. The Dublin regulations have been heavily criticized as

asylum seekers in different states face a considerably variable chance to make a claim and have their case examined. Moreover there are notable differences in the conditions of reception and living conditions. Countries close to the borders such as Greece and Spain face a larger responsibility (as many asylum seekers enter the EU territory by land or boat) but are clearly not able to stand up to it (Schuster, 2011). Nonetheless, asylum seekers are systematically sent back to these countries despite the clause of Sovereignty. This clause outlined in the art. 3(2) of the Dublin regulation enables any State who ratified them to examine an asylum claim submitted in its territory, even if it is not its responsibility according to the criteria set within the regulations. The goal to share the responsibility of asylum seekers thus appears to be used by signatory countries rather as a means to circumvent responsibility altogether. Indeed asylum applications that fall under the Dublin act are not examined in substance as the individuals are systematically sent back to the responsible state.

2.3 Reforms

Since the 1980s legislation concerning asylum in European states has been undergoing reforms aimed at reducing and deterring asylum claims. These reforms include for example measures to reduce access to state territory, to deter arrivals by limiting access to employment, to welfare and to residency, and measures to limit stay by exclusion from the asylum process or the speeding of the process of determination (Gibney & Hansen, 2003). In counterpart new statuses have emerged to accommodate for the asylum applicants who do not strictly fall into the Geneva Convention but who cannot be deported back to their countries of origin notably because they would be threatened by generalized violence and insecurity. Although these new subsidiary statuses offer an improvement for individuals who cannot claim the status of refugee as they are granted temporary protection, these intermediary statuses lead to provisional situations in which living conditions are much more difficult with fewer rights and access to welfare (Piguet, 2009).

The tendency towards restrictiveness has numerous explanations including notably a net increase of asylum claims since the 1980s, the diversification of countries of origin of asylum seekers, the geo-political changes since the dismantling of the Soviet Block, the increasing complexity of reasons for departure, the changes in the economic context of European states (Piguet, 2009). There has also been an increasing politicization of asylum and migration issues and the strengthening of Xenophobic groups within politics. This context has notably led to an intensification of the portrayal of immigration and asylum seekers as a danger to national identity and welfare provisions thereby justifying the securitization of these topics (Huysmans, 2000). Within the field of asylum discourses are typically framed around the need to deter 'bogus' asylum claims, and strengthen procedures. In asylum debates categories such as 'refugee', 'economic migrant', 'illegal immigrant', and 'bogus

asylum seeker' are used as political tools in order to justify the need to reinforce and toughen procedures (Goodman & Speer, 2007). These arguments are based on the assumption that 'real' political refugees can be distinguished from economic migrants. Studies have however demonstrated that reasons for departure are generally a mix of factors most often linked to political instability in the countries of origin (Koser & Martin, 2011). Koser (2011) has highlighted that "the traditional distinctions between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration or 'economic' and 'political' migration, for example, are increasingly out of touch with realities" (p. 4).

2.4 The asylum procedure in Switzerland

Having outlined the general international and European legislative frame as well as the tendencies in national reforms and the representation of asylum seekers in public discourses, this section delves in into the specificities of the asylum procedure in Switzerland. Two aspects are outlined, first the procedure itself and second the determination of refugeehood. Delineating the main lines of the procedure is necessary to understand the legislative and administrative framework in which asylum seekers' stories are situated. The details outlined henceforth concern the most common procedures undergone by the interviewees.

2.4.1 The procedure

According to article 18 of the Asylum Act an asylum application begins the moment a person makes a statement requesting the protection of Switzerland against persecution elsewhere. The application is then usually filed at one of the five Centres for Registration and Procedure (art. 19, AsylA). The asylum seeker is accommodated in this centre the time of his registration and of a first summary interview, which involves questions concerning basic information such as the individual's identity, trajectory to Switzerland, and a motives for coming although the latter is not yet inquired in depth (art. 26, AsylA). For the rest of the procedure the individual can either remain at the centre or be attributed to a canton (art. 27, AsylA). The latter is the case for all the asylum seekers in the study. Following the summary interview, a first procedural decision is taken on the case: whether the administration will proceed to further consider the application ('entrée en matière', art. 31, AsylA). The case is generally rejected without further consultation if the applicant passed through a state that signed the Dublin agreements or a state considered by the administration as secure. The applicant is then transferred back to the previous country of stay or asked to leave the territory before a given deadline.

If the decision taken is to further consider the application, the applicant receives a second audition which seeks to uncover in more depth the details of the motives for seeking asylum (art. 29, AsylA). During the audition several people may be present: the auditioner, a translator, a secretary, a

legal representative, and an observer from a charitable organisation (art. 30, AsylA). Following this audition (sometimes two auditions on the motives are done) a decision is taken. Either the applicant is recognized as having the quality of refugee and is granted asylum (and thus a residency permit of category B) or is not recognized as such (art. 31, AsylA). If the applicant is not recognized as a refugee an expulsion may be effectuated in which case the individual is asked to leave the territory or is deported (art. 45, AsylA). There are however several obstacles to the enforcement of a removal or expulsion. These are listed in the article 83 of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals (FNA, 2005, CC 142.20). The enforcement may not be possible if the person is unable to travel, it may not be permitted if it is prevented by the obligations under an international treaty ratified by Switzerland, or it may be unreasonable if the individual is endangered by situations such as war, generalised violence or a medical emergency. In the case that asylum seekers cannot be sent away, they may receive a temporary admission and a residency permit of category F that needs to be renewed every year. Temporary admission concerns many asylum seekers who are not recognised as refugees but who cannot be sent away. In 2011 for example, 25% of all the asylum seekers whose claims were examined in depth (the claims which are further considered after the summary audition) received a temporary admission (Malka, 2012).

What is particularly relevant to discuss in more depth is the determination of the quality of refugee by the administration. Indeed, it is this aspect which relies particularly on the narratives of the asylum seekers and which leads to a decision.

2.4.2 Determination of refugeehood

The crux of the asylum procedure is the determination of the quality of refugee by the administration. The threat of persecution is the essential condition to be recognized as a refugee. There are various elements of persecution which may be highlighted, these have to all be present in order to fulfil the necessary criteria. These will be briefly outlined (though not in great detail) to demonstrate the specificity of the notion of persecution. The *intensity* of the persecution is evaluated. It may encompass a threat to one's life, to bodily integrity, to freedom, or it may be insurmountable psychological pressure. The *author* has to be the state or a third party if the state cannot provide adequate protection. The person must be *personally targeted* by the persecution. In this regard, a civil war is not considered as a targeted persecution. The *motives* of the persecution have to relate to the definition of refugee contained in article 3 of the Asylum Act. This includes reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The persecution has to be *well-founded*, this notably means that there is a causal link between the persecution (or threat of persecution) and the person's flight. Finally there must be an *absence of*

possibility of internal refuge. This refers to another region in the person's state of origin in which she may have sought the protection of the state (Organisation suisse d'aide au réfugiés, 2009).

In order to determine whether the person presents a threat of persecution that fulfils the above mentioned criteria, the administration rests upon an analysis of the asylum seeker's story, the documents that support this story (such as condemnations), expert evaluations (such as health or psychological reports) and the knowledge concerning the situation of the claimant's state of origin (for examples reports established by various NGOs such as Amnesty International). Central in the determination is the assessment of the credibility of the asylum seeker's story. Article 7 of the Asylum Act (AsyIA) presents this notion of credibility. It is noteworthy to highlight that the French notion present in the law is 'vraisemblance' which is generally translated as credibility. However, the term 'credibility' is also used in French, thus 'vraisemblance' is not exactly analogous. Its meaning can be broadly explained as the 'quality of trueness'. This small gap in meaning between the two terms is however not relevant for this research hence in general the term 'credibility' will be used as a translation of 'vraisemblance'.

The credibility determination process is difficult to delineate, especially considering that the exact criteria employed by the administration is not public information. Moreover the administration has a strong discretionary power rendering a full understanding of this process difficult. Several studies have nonetheless explored credibility assessments in various states and certain elements of what may constitute credibility can be highlighted. Millbank (2009) for example highlights consistency, plausibility and demeanour as factors that can come into play. Although her study concerns Canada and the USA, these elements may be conceived as more general aspects of credibility. Internal consistency refers to how well statements fit together, notably avoiding contradictions. External consistency is the extent to which the narrative coincides with generally known facts outside of the narrative. Plausibility refers to a more "speculative reasoning" on what is deemed likely or real concerning certain situations and the behaviour in these situations (p. 17). Demeanour is the way people appear or behave, and how it seems to others.

3. Narrative inequality

3.1 Issues of interpretation

A number of preconceptions inherent to the procedure lead to issues in the interpretation of narratives. The legislative and administrative framing of refugeehood presupposes that being a refugee is a pre-existing quality which the procedure simply seeks to uncover. An asylum seeker is subject to a procedure of recognition in order to establish whether one is or not a refugee. This purports the notion that refugeehood is something that stands objectively and outside of historical,

political, social and economic contingencies (Piguet, 2013). Furthermore, this conception supposes that refugeehood can be uncovered through the story provided by the claimant. The main means is the credibility determination which seeks to uncover the 'truth' (Macklin, 1998). This leads to two (mis)conceptions, that there is a 'truth out there' and that this 'truth' can be uncovered through the story.

Such conceptions of refugeehood gloss over a number of important aspect concerning truth, narration and interpretation. Conceptions of what a refugee is and what constitutes a refugee experience is socially and historically contingent. In this regard Fresia, Bozzini, and Sala, (2013) suggests that the demands of material proof to authenticate the stories as well as a more general bureaucratization and standardization of credibility evaluation are leading to a shift from a political to a humanitarian conception of asylum. Rather than political struggles, humanitarian aspects such as individual suffering, trauma, or tragic narratives are increasingly emphasized as legitimate evidence. Drawing from a research conducted by Fassin and d'Halluin (2005) Eastmond notes a similar shift towards trauma and physical injury as the "main currency for admission" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 260). This contributes to a change within administrations and public discourses in the general conception of what constitutes a refugee and the refugee experience. It is not just the administrative conception of refugeehood which is socially and historically contingent; asylum seekers also hold a wide diversity of understandings of both fear and persecution. This diversity is further escalated by the variety of origins and experiences of the asylum seekers. However bureaucratic modes expect specific representations of persecution which are often not familiar to the asylum seekers (Shuman & Bohmer, 2004).

Failure to take into account contingencies of "culture, gender, class, education, trauma, nervousness, and simple variations amongst humans" can give rise to erroneous interpretations of the story (Macklin, 1998, p. 137). However, even being aware of such contingencies still does not shield from mistakes as there is no means of verifying the story. Acknowledging that credibility determination is a matter of interpretation thus requires shifting notions of truth. Indeed interpretation by definition underlines that there may a diverse range of possible interpretations.

The judicial approach presumes that truth can be uncovered within the story. However as highlighted by Eastmond, stories are directed by "narrative truth", which is not a transparent rendition of reality but rather an "inescapably imperfect and fluid work of memory, organization and meaning" (2007, p. 260). Decision makers thus play a strong interpretative role when engaging in credibility assessments for which the criteria are often not known by the narrator nor by the audience. Nonetheless truth is conceived as self-contained within the story and not as signalled by

the decision-maker. This further purports conceptions of truth as objective and discoverable (Millbank, 2009).

Macklin (1998) heavily criticizes such notions of truth and the consequences they may have in credibility determinations. Having long worked at the immigration and refugee board of Canada, Macklin, now a law scholar, has a deep insight in issues pertaining to credibility assessments. She provides a whole range of elements that can lead to wrong adjudications and provides examples from her own experience. Regularly conclusions on the same case differ between decision makers revealing the role of personal contingencies in influencing interpretation. She thus states that “if there is an objective reality out there, [she’s] unlikely to discern it except incidentally” (p. 139). She highlights what she calls the “avoidance tactic” (p. 134) which refers to the tendency to avoid basing negative decisions on credibility because it is more difficult to articulate in rational terms and to rather use arguments that shift the responsibility on the asylum seeker, for example the lack of material proof. This can typically lead to inconsistencies and arbitrariness of the decision making. She voices a particularly striking conclusion which comes close to the self-reflection demanded in qualitative research:

Ultimately I came to the conclusion that credibility determination is not about “discovering” truth. It is, rather, about making choices – what to accept, what to reject, how much to believe, where to draw the line – in the face of empirical uncertainty. [...] credibility determination is necessarily and inexorably subjective. As a consequence [...] we also have to look inwards – at our own values, prejudices, orientation and perspective [...] (p. 140).

3.2 Questions of recognition

What is recognition? It is important to distinguish the practical use of the term from its use as a concept. As a practical term it refers to the judicial decision in which asylum seekers are recognized as refugees and provided with state protection. The concept of recognition is more difficult to define as it has been used by different scholars for diverging theories particularly in political philosophy. I will attempt to provide a definition based on Nancy Fraser’s (2000) notion of the concept as applied by Jay Marlowe (2010) to the case of refugees. Recognition here is understood as the act of acknowledging a person or party as having a voice, individuality, and establishing them as agents capable of contributing to society. According to Fraser (2000) the concept of recognition needs to be thought with that of redistribution to avoid the risk of marginalizing the latter. Moreover she cautions against the danger of descending into identity politics which reifies groups under master statuses displacing redistribution questions. In the context of this research the concept of recognition is particularly useful to understand the effects of the administrative decision for asylum seekers. It is

concerned with the (narrative) identity and individuality of the person which raises questions of participation and redistribution.

Recognizing someone's voice is to recognize the particular ways in which individuals produce meaning. "It is the capacity to make oneself understood in one's own terms, to produce meaning under conditions of empowerment" (Blommaert, 2006b, p. 240). Indeed to make sense is more concretely 'making sense in particular ways' and requires acknowledging "the variation and variability as 'natural' features of society" (ibid., p. 241). This is applicable to asylum seekers as to understand their story it is necessary to actively engage in the particular ways they 'make sense' and represent their experience. Indeed the danger is to read their story using our own frames of reference. This holds the risk of eluding the meaning they assign to their experiences. We need to provide them with circumstances in which negotiation of how their story is understood and interpreted is possible. A prerequisite to such negotiation is parity of participation in the social interaction. Recognizing the individuality and voice of an individual is allowing them to participate as "full partners in social interactions" (Marlowe, 2010, p. 186).

Recognition of one's individuality is essential for participation, but may also hold a deeper existential value. It is particularly important for asylum seekers, as it means recognizing how the person creates individual coherence out of disparate experiences and represents oneself and these experiences. However there is a tendency to impose upon asylum seekers preconceived notions of the refugee experience. Zetter (2007) employs the useful concept of labelling to depict the process by which an administrative category - that of refugee in this case - is assigned to individuals. It is a process that enables to understand the determinant role of bureaucratic procedures in defining the label and hence the individuals who are labelled. The means of definition include for example the established criteria of persecution and credibility determination. The asylum seekers thus have to fulfill the bureaucratic definitions and modes of representation. Moreover these definitions impact the way refugees are conceived by the public.

A striking example is the bureaucratic demand for stories that reflect trauma or physical injury as legitimate forms of persecution. Psychological or physical injuries associated with trauma rather than the testimonies or narratives become the primary social currency when asylum seekers attempt to uphold the truthfulness of their claim (Marlowe, 2010, p. 190). These administrative definitions of refugeehood hence cover up the individual meanings that people attribute to their experiences. As noted by Daniel and Knudsen (1995): "Individualities constructed in oral autobiographies are deemed irrelevant by many caseworkers, whereas for the refugee this is the foundation on which a meaningful world may be rebuilt" (p. 5). Moreover administrative notions of refugeehood are then taken up in the media and in public discourses. Consequently trajectories of

refugees are poorly understood and essentialised as “dominant discourses on refugees tend to narrowly focus on the person as a passive victim” (Marlowe, 2010, p. 189). However as Shuman & Bohmer (2004) have noted “For some applicants, describing oneself as a victim of persecution is incompatible with recovering a sense of dignity or personal integrity following a trauma” (p. 406). One solution offered by Marlowe (2010) is to focus on the ordinary aspects of the story thereby acknowledging people outside of the refugee label.

CHAPTER III: EXPLORING NARRATION IN THE FIELD

1. Methodology

As my research focuses on narratives of asylum seekers it seemed obvious to employ a narrative approach in the interview and analytical process. However there are also some important epistemological and theoretical motivations in making such a choice. Moreover I was confronted to a rather large range of methodological approaches in narrative research, each with their own specific considerations. I thus set forth to elaborate a canvas that would fit my own research by borrowing elements from the different narrative research approaches. This section will focus on outlining some of the epistemological and methodological aspects of my research in relation to the central question: How do individuals engage in the processes of narrating their life as asylum seekers? Moreover, a narrative approach alone proved not to be sufficient in order to fully explore my research question. I thus also borrowed some elements from grounded theory methods. This raised certain questions concerning the possibility to combine different methodological approaches. This first section is thus divided into four. Firstly I briefly present my epistemological approach with regards to the data. Secondly I discuss the role of the interactional and situational context in eliciting narratives and how this led me to choose to examine stories emerging in the interview context rather than the audition. Moreover I briefly present why I chose to interview legal caseworkers. Thirdly I explain the approaches chosen for my analysis, which involves a combination of narrative analysis and grounded theory. Fourthly I discuss ethical issues stemming from narrative research, particularly with regards to the representation of the narratives.

1.1 Epistemological positioning

The principle aim in my research is to understand how asylum seekers narrate their story of asylum and why they narrate it as such. The answer to this question is sought within the story itself and by taking into account the interactional and situational context. As presented in the chapter on the concept of narrative identity, meaning and representation are conceived as emerging in the process

of narration. Furthermore meaning cannot be apprehended in isolation but in relation to the whole story and to the interactional and situational context. Accessing meaning in the story thus requires a process of hermeneutical interpretation in which there is a constant to and fro between understanding of individual elements and understanding of their relation to the whole, this whole being the emerging thematic plot in narrative analysis. This is similar to the hermeneutical process depicted by Bruner (1991). It implies furthermore that my intentions and questions as an interpreter as well as my background, prior knowledge and presuppositions shape the outcome of the interpretation. Hence as a researcher I merely engage in a process of translation using his own tools and language.

1.2 interactional and situational context

How do asylum seekers narrate their life story in light of their application procedure? This question is focused on understanding how people tell about their experiences and implies another central question: “Why was the story told that way?” (Riessman, 2002, p. 697). Riessman proposes to take a performative approach to answer such an inquiry. Her approach is interesting in that it specifically emphasizes the relational and situational context. Narrative identities in this view arise in social interaction and can be conceived as a struggle over what meaning is attributed to experience. Such a struggle implies a negotiation between the teller and listener on how they want to be known. Riessman (2002) thus suggests focusing notably on social positioning in narratives – how narrators position themselves, their audience and the characters in their story. For example in particular situations or events the narrator can position herself as a victim of the circumstances or on the contrary as initiators of action providing a different image of themselves. Such an observation reveals that a narrative retelling does not only serve the purpose of enacting identity but usually the story also has a ‘point to make’ depending on the context of the telling.

The particular goal of a story and the way that experiences are selected and assembled to contribute to the intended point will depend on the circumstances and conditions of the telling and the contingencies of the encounter with the listener (Marita Eastmond, 1996). This leads to questions such as: “How is the meaning of a narrative framed by the particular setting in which it is produced, with the setting’s distinctive understandings, concerns, and resources?” Or: “What are the purposes and consequences of narrating experience in particular ways?” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 350). Moreover when seeking to understand the production and circulation of particular stories it is also necessary to apprehend how stories gain acceptance or are challenged.

When exploring why asylum seekers tell their story in a particular way it is important to understand the context of the telling such as the audience, the way the narrative is brought about

(i.e. what questions are asked), the knowledge of both listener and narrator concerning the consequences of the telling and so forth. The situation in which the story is told shapes the point of the story. It will not be the same in the context of an asylum audition than in the context of the research interview. As my research question is focused on understanding the perspective of the asylum seekers I chose to use the narratives told in an interview context rather than in the audition. Drawing the differences between these two settings highlights why the situation of the interview enables to better access the perspective of the asylum seekers. The differences that I will describe henceforth are partly based on my own experience during the interviews and what I know of the auditions and partly on the depiction by the asylum seekers and legal case workers of the setting of the audition.

During an audition asylum seekers are strongly aware of the practical consequences of their narration, as what they say is taken as a basis to determine whether they fulfil or not the criteria to be recognized as refugees. There are usually several people present, and the format of the interview consists of specific questions geared at determining their motives and the truthfulness of their story. Asylum seekers in this context are not only alert to the fact that what they say may have enormous consequences on their lives, but their story is strongly directed by the questions asked. In contrast, during the research interview I strongly emphasized my independence from the administration as well as the anonymity of the information. Moreover the format included an opening question which I let my informants answer freely without intervening. Such a format enables the participants to follow their own agenda rather than that of the interrogator, thereby avoiding the fragmentation of standard interrogatory formats (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). However the opening question does impose a certain framework, in this case that of being an asylum seeker, which must be considered during the analysis. Following the opening question, the interview involved open-ended questions with the purpose of understanding elements in the story and the perception and experience of the asylum procedure, and not to probe their motives and the truthfulness of their story. Moreover I chose to do the interviews in the neutral setting of the university or in the more intimate setting of my living room thereby contributing to set a climate of comfort and trust. The setting of the interview is thus more appropriate to access narratives that reflect the perspective of the asylum seekers and is necessary to hear their perception and experiences of the asylum procedure. Although this setting aimed at being more impartial and open than the audition, the introducing narrative question was nonetheless also directed as it requested the individual's story as an asylum seeker.

There is a third setting which involves the narratives of asylum seekers: the meetings they hold with legal caseworkers who may provide help through the procedure. The setting is similar to that of the interview in terms of independence from the administration and confidentiality of the

information as well as the fact that no administrative decision is taken based on what is told during the exchange. However as the aim is to provide help on an administrative and legal level, the caseworkers have to work with this legal and administrative framework. I chose to do the interviews with the legal caseworkers to better understand how the legal setting may frame the narratives of the asylum seekers. To understand what kind of issues emerge with regards to the drawing forth of narratives and what kind of constraints the legal framework may impose on the work of the caseworkers.

1.3 combining grounded theory and narrative analysis

Drawing from Jerome Bruner, Polkinghorne (1995) makes a distinction between two modes of reasoning: paradigmatic cognition and narrative cognition. Outlining this distinction is relevant to understand the particularities of narrative analysis but also how it differs from more traditional research methodologies such as grounded theory. Paradigmatic cognition refers to the traditional Western scientific knowledge which focuses on rationality as the legitimate mode of knowing. It employs categories and concepts to classify instances and focuses on the elements that enable to attribute a particular component to a general category. Paradigmatic thought enables to order experience by linking specific things to formal categories and how the latter gives identity to the former. Grounded theory employs this type of reasoning as it focuses on concepts inductively derived from the data. Narrative cognition on the other hand seeks to understand human action. Human action is viewed as formed by the interaction of the person's past knowledge and experiences, present situation and future goals and purposes. Narrative knowledge thus focuses specifically on the particular characteristics of individual action such as its emotional and motivational meaning as they appear in the story. The challenge for the researcher is to identify a plot in the narrative that links the data elements together. Moreover narrative analysis allows for notions of "human purpose and choice", "chance happenings, dispositions, and environmental presses" to be incorporated (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). Both modes of cognition differ in their apprehension of truth. Paradigmatic cognition aims at establishing truth whilst narrative thought seeks rather to persuade on the basis of its meaningfulness.

Grounded theory and narrative analysis thus draw from different modes of reasoning. Lal, Suto, and Ungar (2012) outline further differences between the two methods in a comparative paper. For example they argue that both approaches differ in their methodological purpose. Grounded theory seeks to understand social processes and human action by developing concepts and theories. Narrative inquiry focuses specifically on understanding human experiences by looking at how they are presented in narratives rather than what the content of the narratives convey. The

ontological assumption of narrative inquiry is that experiences are organized in a storied form. This leads to differences in the data analyses as grounded theory is “category centered” whereas narrative inquiry is rather “case centered” (Lal et al., 2012, p. 11). Grounded theory focuses on relationships between themes and concepts across interviews whereas narrative inquiry derives theory from particular stories keeping these intact. The unit of analysis in narrative inquiry is thus the story whereas in grounded theory it is fragmented through the process of coding. Despite these differences Lal et al. (2012) also highlight that the two methodologies present certain similarities and that the two can be combined as long as the epistemological position remains coherent. Indeed many constructivist grounded approaches such as Kathy Charmaz (1999) employ principles of narrative inquiry. For example close attention is paid to the diversity of perspectives amongst the participants and researchers, the influence of the specific and broader socio-historical context and the importance of the reflexive role of the researcher in every step of the research.

In this research I sought to engage in a narrative inquiry to understand the individual experiences of the asylum seekers as expressed through their stories. However the aim was also to understand the process of narration itself in the context of asylum, hence elements of grounded methods were used in order to provide explanations. Coding however was mainly used as a means to organize certain emerging themes in order to engage in a comparative analysis between the cases and with information provided by the legal case workers to establish broader conclusions. Hence the main methodological line of the research remains within the lines of narrative inquiry.

1.4 Narrative as joint production and other ethical considerations

There are a number of ethical issues specific to narrative research that are necessary to highlight. The ethical issues discussed henceforth particularly concern the representation of asylum seekers’ narratives. This focus on questions of representation stems from my research question, which induced reflections on what kind of knowledge is produced and how the stories presented in the research should be apprehended by the reader. This section thus begins by highlighting the initial ethical considerations underlining my research focus. Then the issues I was confronted to with regard to these considerations are reviewed – namely how to adequately represent the narratives of the participants maintaining the authenticity of their voice. Finally, how I dealt with these issues are discussed.

My choice to focus on the perspective of asylum seekers was largely motivated by a concern for social justice – that of representing marginalized voices. Indeed, as highlighted by O’Neill and Harindranath (2006), there is a tendency for individuals to be represented by others when they are assigned the label of asylum seeker, be it by the administration, the media or refugee advocacy

groups. In the absence of an alternative voice representing their perspective, the researcher's role as an interpreter becomes focused on creating spaces for these voices to speak for themselves. This may be achieved through close attention to text and "emic forms of discursive organization", which enable to demonstrate the particular ways individuals produce meanings (Blommaert, 2006b, p. 241). Drawing from Dell Hymes, Blommaert suggests that this is a form of "functional restoration" as disempowered individuals are provided the space necessary to produce their own meaning in their own particular way (2006b, p. 240). In the course of my research however I was confronted to my role as a researcher and interpreter and how this role intervened with individuals' own meaning making. Indeed, I found that through my interpretation I was in a sense rewriting the participants' stories, which spurred questions such as: 'how can we produce knowledge that is authentic to individuals own self-representation'? My interventionist role became apparent in an interaction with one of the participants. The anecdote will be recounted as it illustrates well the problem at hand.

Edy, one of the participants in my research, was particularly aware of compromising elements in his story. He thus asked to read the section concerning him that would appear in the paper before it would be handed in. Following his rereading, we had a discussion on my analysis. He explained that although my analysis fitted well what he had said during the interview, it did not exactly reflect his own understanding. He emphasized that it had to do with what was said during the interview, and not an erroneous interpretation of his words. However, this discussion made me aware that the narrative provided during the interview depends largely on the interaction between the teller and listener, notably on the questions asked. Taking a single interview hence presents the drawback of accessing only a restricted part of an individual's narrative. As highlighted in the discussion on narrative identity, individuals are composed of a multiplicity of situated selves, and hence a multitude of inter-related narratives (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Only fragments of the individual's identity are revealed in each narrative moment that fit the particular interactional and situational context. By using a single story as epistemological knowledge there is the danger of misrepresenting the person by omitting important elements of his or her self-understanding. I was particularly conscious of this issue considering that my research departs from the criticism of the misrepresentation of asylum seekers and their lack of control over the way their story is assessed.

One way of providing asylum seekers more space for self-representation would be to involve them not only as informants but also in the interpretative process. O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) suggest using more participatory methodologies such as participatory action research. Another means would be to involve the participants in the analysis by offering them the opportunity to reread their stories and provide modifications or suggestions. Such research approaches were however beyond the means of this research, I therefore had to deal differently with the issue of having a

single interview and thus a single narrative to interpret. I suggest emphasizing the stories presented in the research as co-constructions. This enables to stress my co-author role in the representation and interpretation of individuals' story. This is achieved notably in the detailed presentation of my analysis, which provides transparency with regards to my engagement with the texts

2. Methods

Having outlined the theoretical lines underlining the methods chosen for my research the following section elaborates more specifically the strategies employed and how the research proceeded. The steps discussed are the sampling methods, the interview strategy, the method of analysis, and the presentation of the results.

2.1 Sampling methods

In order to access the asylum seekers gate-keepers had to be resorted to. Two of the asylum seekers were accessed through a Swiss woman who organises activities with asylum seekers entirely independently from the procedure. I was able to meet one of the asylum seekers, Norbu, before proposing to participate in the research. When I told him about my study he spontaneously suggested to act as an informant and provided me with his contact details. The other asylum seeker, Umit, is a friend of the Swiss gate-keeper who gave me his email contact. I was therefore able to provide both of the participants with more information and organise the interview via email. Accessing these two asylum seekers through this Swiss informant contributed to the establishment of an initial atmosphere of trust as my independence from the administration was made clear.

I sought to contact further asylum seekers through similar informal methods. However this proved to be difficult. I avoided using the snowball method which would have led to participants from the same 'pool' of asylum seekers. I was hoping to gather a diverse range of informants from different origins, backgrounds, group of friends and at different stages of the procedure. I also wanted to avoid accessing the participants through the administration thinking that it would hinder the necessary trust required for the interviews. I presented my research in numerous language classes, providing information sheets in French and English including details concerning the research and my contact details. This gave me access to one more informant, Alex, who is the only asylum seeker amongst my interviewees who benefited from the support of a legal caseworker. The legal caseworkers were reticent to contact asylum seekers as they are bound by professional confidentiality and did not want to put asylum seekers in compromising situations. In the end I resorted to contacting an asylum seeker residency centre explaining my research and my search for informants. I was provided with the contact details of several asylum seekers and chose to contact three, Edy, Paul and Pemba. Interestingly my fears that my informants would lack trust to open up if I

contacted them through the official structures proved to be wrong. These participants revealed important aspects of their narratives and perceptions of the procedure.

The legal case workers were on the other hand very easy to contact and willing to participate in the research despite their busy schedules. They were informed about the research by email which I sent to their respective organisations.

2.2 Interview strategy

The interviews with the asylum seekers were divided in two parts, a first narrative part and a second part in which I explored topics relating to the procedure in more depth through semi-directive questions. The introduction of my interviews proved to be particularly important as they determined whether the necessary trust was established. I informed them in detail concerning the purpose of my research, what kind of questions I would ask them, the possibility to withdraw from the research at any moment and to refuse answering certain questions, as well as the strict anonymity (notably the use of pseudonyms). I particularly emphasized confidentiality, informing them that their names would not appear in the research. During the second interview I conducted the participant requested specific information concerning legislative details and how his case would be assessed. Following this interview I also made it clearer to the participants that I could not help them in their application.

After providing the necessary information I began with my first question, asking them to talk about their life and what led to Switzerland. This prompted most asylum seekers to provide an in-depth answer during which I seldom intervened and only to clarify details. Once the story was finished (in all cases there was a clear ending either explicit in the phrasing or by the participants request for the 'next' question) I asked some questions concerning their experience of the procedure and their perception and knowledge of refugeehood and asylum before and since arriving in Switzerland.

The two first interviews (Norbu and Umit) were conducted beginning 2013 in the context of a methodological course at the University of Neuchâtel. These interviews were led in my living room as I had a more informal contact with them previously. The informal and personal context of my home provided a space which emphasized the distinction from the administration and audition context thereby contributing to the openness of the narrators. Indeed both did not hesitate to describe emotional or strenuous experiences in their stories. Umit's interview lasted particularly long (three hours) as he delved into a detailed recounting of his trip to Europe. I refrained however from cutting him off in order not to censure him according to my research interest.

The other interviews were held mid-2014. The long time between the two sets of interviews can be explained first by the fact that the research focus, theoretical framework and methodological

aspects were further developed during that time. Secondly, this is also explained by the difficulty of finding research participants which has already been outlined. These interviews were all conducted at the university in order to provide a neutral setting. Alex's interview was particularly difficult as I was not always sure to understand him and because he delved into very personal aspects of his emotional and health situation. I dealt with this situation by acknowledging his narrative, demonstrating cues for compassion but attempting to keep a certain emotional distance myself. Paul's interview was similarly engaging but smoother as he used a lot of humor. Edy had a good command of English. The interview was nevertheless challenging as he did not hesitate to ask critical questions with regards to my research. The interview with Pemba was much shorter than the others, lasting barely forty minutes. As there was very little material to work with I decided not to engage in an in-depth analysis of her interview.

The interviews with the legal case workers were carried out in their respective offices. The questioning followed an interview grid; hence the interviews took a semi-directed format. Many questions also came up during the interview prompted by the participants' answers. Although I requested specific examples this proved to be difficult as they are bound by professional confidentiality. Nonetheless they did provide some general examples. Unlike the interviews with the asylum seekers, they were carried out in French hence they had to be translated for the write up of the research.

2.3 Method of Analysis

Finding an adequate path for analysis was done intuitively by combining different methods. The principle method of inspiration was Rosenthal's (2004) narrative analysis. However, certain elements proposed by Flick's (2006) thematic analysis were also retained. Indeed, certain aspects of Rosenthal's method remaining vague, Flick's suggestion to analyse the sequential construction of emerging themes appeared to be particularly relevant for this case. Saldaña's (Saldaña, 2009) chapter on coding also proved to be a useful guide to coding, a method that was applied during the thematic analysis. The following section describes in detail the steps that were employed for analysing the data. For the sake of anonymity, all the names of people were changed to pseudonyms and the specific name of places were left out or initialised (when included in a quotation).

The analysis of the narrative material already collected began whilst the interview process was still going on. This was possible because the interviews were broached as individual cases. The first step when apprehending a new interview was to go through a global analysis (Flick, 2006); the story was read through enabling to make a first identification of certain recurring or important themes as well as make some preliminary notes concerning the structure of the story.

Following Rosenthal (2004), the second step was an analysis of the biographical data. All the data devoid of any subjective interpretation of the interviewee was listed. A first set of hypotheses was generated from this data for the first three interviews that were analyzed. However this proved to be redundant as it did not bring the analysis forwards. A more important step in this stage of the analysis was the collection of additional information concerning the political situation in the respective countries. It enabled to understand important references within the narratives and to better grasp contextual aspects of the events related.

In the third step the story as told was apprehended. Delineating the life story was obvious in certain cases and more tedious in others. In most cases however the participant uttered a sentence that could be identified as closing the initial jet of the story. Hence I made a distinction between what I termed the “first jet” and the narrative elements that came up later on, notably spurred by more specific questions. Indeed in all cases the narrative material spanned across the whole interview hence it involved a lot of juggling with the data. However to make the distinction between the first jet and the rest enabled to draw specific conclusions. The life story was thus first sectioned into small units according to thematic shifts and changes of textual sorts (following Rosenthal, 2004). The textual sorts include descriptive, narrative, expository (geared at explanation) and argumentative (geared at evaluation and subjective judgment) sorts. To keep an overview of the text, the sections were grouped and named with titles and subtitles. This was a crucial step in order to understand the structure and sequencing of the life story and begin to identify a plot. Following this step a first list of topics and possible thematic groups was established, and memos written for each.

The fourth step was an in depth analysis of the story as told. This involved a process of continual alternation between the identification of themes, and writing memos to understand the way the themes were presented and their role in the broader story. Hence the location of the themes within the narrative and the textual sort were analysed. This served to understand why a particular topic emerged in a specific point of the story. Here the questions proposed by Rosenthal (2004) were very helpful (p.58): Why is she or he presenting this sequence in such a way? Why at this place – and in this sequential order? Why in this text sort? Why in this length? Why this topic or content? What does the biographer not present? Which biographical data is left out or not elaborated? What is the thematic field? Which themes do not fit in the data? The data was also confronted with questions concerning the interactional and contextual situation. This included a constant self-reflection concerning my role in eliciting certain answers.

Following the first analysis of the life story the conception of notions such as asylum, refugeehood, exile and the experience of the procedure were apprehended. These emerged both from the life story and from the more specific answers to my open-ended questions. Rather than

coding using single words or small phrases, the themes were mainly analysed by means of memos. These served to establish connections between the asylum seekers' conception and understanding of their situation of asylum and the way the life story was told. It is through this continual juggling of the data that explanations emerged.

The write up of each case was also an important step as it enabled to apprehend the main themes and plot within every narrative and provide a first set of conclusions for each respectively. Drawing from each case a transversal comparative analysis was then engaged. The narratives were compared along the lines of the plot, themes, aim of the story, self-presentation. This enabled to identify similarities and differences with regards to the way in which the asylum seekers engaged in the process of narration.

The interviews with the legal case workers were also analysed using thematic codes. The two interviews were relatively similar so I was able to directly engage in a comparison between the two. This was helped by the formation of a table in which the codes were grouped according to broader thematic lines. These broad thematic lines also organised the presentation of the results. The interviews with the legal caseworkers were particularly useful when apprehending issues raised by the framework of asylum. Indeed, they were aware of many of these issues and sometimes provided indications as to how they may or may not be dealt with.

2.4 Presentation of results

The presentation of the analysis of the asylum seekers' interviews was rather straightforward; following in general lines the process of analysis. Each narrative was presented individually as a case study. The presentation followed a similar line for each case starting with the biographical data, followed by the life story, the general themes broached in the story, and the perception of asylum and the procedure, and finally a conclusion summarising the main plot lines and initial considerations that were later taken up in the discussion. I chose to present two narratives in greater detail, that of Umit and Alex. Due to the length and convolutions within their narratives, these interviews required more involvement during the analytical process. Moreover they provide a lot of important considerations for the discussion. The analysis of the other narratives is presented more briefly for various reasons. The full analysis of Norbu's narrative figures in a previous paper on methodology (Burki, 2013). The narrative and analysis presented henceforth draws the important lines relevant for the discussion. Edy's narrative is not presented fully as it contains compromising elements, the most significant aspects are discussed in detail. The presentation of Paul's story also focuses only on the relevant aspects as a large portion of his narrative was focused on depicting elements that were not pertinent for the discussion. Although three of the narratives are summarized in the write-up of the

analysis, the two stories that engage in greater depth provide an insight into the detailed engagement with the interview texts, thereby demonstrating my interpretative and co-author role.

The analysis of the legal caseworkers' interviews followed the emergence of themes which were common to both. These were grouped along three main lines which represent aspects of their work with the asylum seekers: their role conception, how they draw the stories forth, and how they apprehend the narratives. The presentation of these themes enables to provide an initial insight into issues relating to the apprehension of narratives within the constraints of a legal framework.

CHAPTER IV PART 1: ASYLUM SEEKER STORIES

1. Umit

1.1 Biographical data

Umit is a young man in his early twenties of Afghan nationality. He is a Shia Hazara, one of the four ethnic groups in Afghanistan. During the Soviet Union's incursion in Afghanistan (1979-1989) Umit's parents move to Pakistan and then to Iran. They move several times within Iran before settling in the province N where Umit is born. Umit thus receives ID papers from this province (N) and is territorially assigned to this area. The family however moves to another province, Q, after some years. This proves to be problematic for Umit's schooling as his ID papers come from N. In the space of five years he attends over eleven schools. He ends up studying at home and returns to N to pass his final exams.

In 2007 the Iranian government begins designating certain areas and provinces as 'no-go' for Afghans (Koepke, 2011). The family is able to change the ID papers from province N which becomes a no-go area to Q. Two years later however, the province Q also becomes a no-go area for Afghans and the family is not able to change their IDs. At that time Afghan students in the city where they live are being systematically expelled from schools. Umit's family thus moves back to Afghanistan. However in Afghanistan Umit is not able to continue his studies as he is robbed and loses his school report. He returns illegally to Iran and begins working in a Mosaic factory. He then moves to province Q where he takes English and Computer classes and works in a mobile repair shop.

One day Umit lends his phone to one of his clients whose own phone is in repair. However during the night this man loses Umit's phone while running away from the police. Umit's phone ends up in the hands of the police who try to trace back to him. As Umit is illegally staying in Iran he decides to leave. He contacts a smuggler and is able to depart immediately. He then pursues a travel through Turkey, Greece and Italy that takes approximately three weeks until he reaches Switzerland.

At the moment of our interview Umit has had his summary interview and is waiting for the second interview (the interview on motives).

1.2 Life story

In view of the length of my interview with Umit, his answer to my first opening question is relatively short. In this first question I ask him: "I want to know a little bit about you, about your life, where you grew up, where you lived, what were important things in your life. And then a little bit about your decision to come to Switzerland." Umit's answer does not highlight any events in particular that pushes him to leave. It rather recounts his personal trajectory (embedded in his family's trajectory) in terms of his administrative, geographical and educational situation. He also outlines the general socio-political situation in Afghanistan and Iran emphasizing the discrimination faced by the Hazara. That his initial story is short and focused on painting in broad strokes the insecurity both in Afghanistan and Iran demonstrates what we later learn: that this general insecurity and lack of opportunity is what he considers being the main reasons for his departure. It is important to note that Umit does not outline in the first jet of his story any events justifying his departure to Europe and his asylum claim (according to the definition of refugeehood). His justification fits rather his initial understanding of the notion of refugeehood, an important point which will be discussed further on.

The themes that come up in Umit's initial narrative are not contained solely within this first answer but rather extend through a large part of the interview. Some important events come up later on triggered by other questions. The first jet however serves as a basis or a kind of structure of the story in which most themes later addressed are at least mentioned. The second question notably triggers a much more extensive response. I ask: "when you decided that you wanted to leave how did you go about to prepare the trip to come here?" The answer to this second question is first focused on the events leading to his departure and then recounts his trip in great detail. The events leading to his departure hold little weight in terms of the meaning and reasons attributed to his departure.

Umit tells his story using a lot of examples, small stories taken from what he has heard. Although he only "thought of leaving" he analyses his departure in terms of the threats he perceives that correspond to his initial notion of refugeehood, and the fact that he believes he will receive asylum.

1.3 Themes

1.3.1 Mobility

Mobility emerges as a theme right at the beginning of the interview when Umit sets the context for his story. He does not broach the theme as a topic as such but rather through a series of report textual sorts whereby he describes his parents' geographical trajectory and later the family's movements in Iran till their return to Afghanistan. Umit's story is thus embedded from the start in a family history of mobility and displacement. This is an important point as later situations and occurrences are consequences of this mobility, and particularly of being Afghan in Iran. Indeed this has an incidence on the family's administrative situation in Iran, on their subsequent moving, on Umit's schooling, and the affinities he develops in each state. Mobility is a theme that spans through most of the interview as a large part of the episodes he recounts are concerned with depicting his movements. It can thus be identified as a theme which plays an important role in structuring the plot of his story. This section will delve deeper into this theme demonstrating how it is presented by Umit and what functions it plays in the narrative.

Umit does not identify his parents as refugees however he begins his story by informing that they moved during the Soviet Union attack in Afghanistan. We can thus infer that the political situation in Afghanistan was the main motivator for the parent's initial move. Indeed the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1978 engendered a level of violence which spurred an unprecedented migration of Afghans. Millions took old migratory routes to neighboring countries particularly Iran and Pakistan. The intervention of the United States following the September 11 attacks led to the defeat of the Talibans, and the creation of a democratic government supported by the international community. Despite the large movements of repatriation and the increasing restrictiveness of the Iranian government towards Afghan immigrants, strong migratory routes were established intensified not only by the networks in place but by a number of factors including the perpetuating insecurity, demographic pressures and lack of economic opportunities in Afghanistan (Monsutti, 2009). Although Umit does not go into detail concerning his parent's choice of movement, it can be understood in the more general context (provided that the listener is aware of it). What is clear is that Umit 'follows' until their return to Afghanistan hence he does not hold the responsibility or the reigns for his initial context of mobility. It is only once in Afghanistan that he takes his own decisions for subsequent movings.

Mobility is closely linked to the administrative situation of Umit and his family, as their location determines their administrative status, which in turn has an incidence on their subsequent moves. It is interesting to analyze the link between mobility and the administrative situation in

Umit's story as it reveals the mix between circumstantial pressure and choice in leading events. Indeed the administrative status of the family, and later of Umit, plays an ambivalent role in the story. It is sometimes presented as a forceful factor for immobility or movement demonstrating the power of official administrations over individuals, sometimes as a limitation that can be breached revealing the agency individuals withhold.

1.3.2 Mobility and the Administrative status

Umit ends his account of his various parents' moving by announcing his birth and immediately depicts the administrative consequence. He receives an ID from his province of birth in Iran and is restricted geographically to that area. His parents nevertheless decide to move to another province where there are more Afghans and jobs for his father. However Umit's ID being from another province this causes a lot of issues for his schooling. He attends over 11 schools in the space of five years. Hence in moving the parents breach the geographical limitation imposed by their administrative status. However by doing so they limit Umit's access to a regular education. Although they have a certain margin of choice, the boundaries remain blurry. As they take their agency in terms of their mobility they reduce certain opportunities and open others. How this space of agency is presented depends on the narrator. In Umit's story the role of the administrative status in delimiting his agency to move fluctuates according to the subsequent events he depicts.

As the Iranian government changes policy in 2007 it begins designating 'no-go' areas for Afghans including Umit's birthplace. The family manages to change their ID location once, but as their new location also becomes a no-go area they are forced to leave and return back to Afghanistan. Umit highlights this episode by depicting the general situation of Afghan students in the region at that time. Students are expelled from school "in a bad way". Moreover he highlights how they attempt to argue for their case:

We try hard, too much and we went to United Nation, to Human Rights, to Afghanistan embassy, to Iran Minister, interior minister. But we couldn't do anything. They told us you have to leave here and go to Afghanistan. So we went to Afghanistan.

Here he clearly depicts the moving to Afghanistan as being a consequence of the Iranian policy towards Afghans. He presents the moving as an obligation – they "couldn't do anything" – thereby depicting it as a displacement (a forced movement) in which they did not have any agency. This paints a picture in which the return to Afghanistan is not a choice. The administrative status is this time compelling in determining their move.

1.3.3 Education

Schooling and education is also an important topic in the first part of the interview. He first recounts all the problems he has in Iran to follow a regular schooling as a consequence of his administrative situation (having an ID from another province.) Although not made explicit as such this episode serves to demonstrate the hardship he encountered already as a child being an Afghan in Iran and not having a strictly legal status in the province his parents' chose to live in. This circumstance leads to a lack of adequate educational opportunities in terms of basic schooling.

The topic of education comes up later when he recounts how he is unable to carry on with his education in Afghanistan as his report is stolen. This is an important episode as it seems to be one of the triggers for his choice to return back (illegally) to Iran. He first presents the episode as the end of his possibility to continue studying in Afghanistan. He then subtly uses it to shift into an exposition of insecurity in Afghanistan, whereby the episode serves as a personal example. The following quote demonstrates this shift: "After that when I came back to my home for a long time I was thinking with myself: "Now I don't have anything to show to continue my study. And how can I continue in this country." The lack of possibility to continue studying is linked to the lack of what he terms elsewhere "destination". In other words there is a lack of opportunity. This episode is then followed by two small stories staging theft, threats and death in acts of robbery that occurred to relations of his. These two examples serve to illustrate the insecurity and criminality enduring in Afghanistan. He then states: "There is- in Afghanistan there is no justice, there is no fair. So I thought myself I couldn't take- I couldn't continue with this situation."

1.3.4 The situation in Afghanistan

In the first part of the interview Umit spends a lot of time depicting the socio-political situation in Afghanistan. He highlights two main aspects: the general insecurity and the discrimination against Hazara and he mentions a third important aspect, religion, which he expands upon later in the interview. This is the main moment in the interview where he elaborates upon the situation in Afghanistan, however issues such as religion and ethnic discrimination come up regularly particularly in the latter half of the interview when he evaluates the procedure. In the first jet however these topics serve to argument his departure first from Afghanistan to Iran, and then from Iran to Switzerland. Indeed these two movements are no longer framed solely as consequence of the political circumstances and his parents' decision, but he also plays an active role in the decision to move.

Before Umit even begins depicting Afghanistan, the listener can already forecast what is to come as he describes how the Iranian government compelled Afghans to return to their country

despite their efforts to remain. We can already infer that there was a general unwillingness to return. He does not provide a clear reason for this reluctance however we can imagine that many Afghans have established a situation in Iran, many of the young have spent their entire life in the country, and the situation in Afghanistan was probably not the most appealing. Both inferences above are confirmed just after:

Then we went to Afghanistan. But suddenly I was shocked by my Afghanistan because it was completely different from the place I grew up, I was born. Afghanistan was completely different from Iran. And every day I heard bad story that one person were killed in that time, in this city, one person killed in that another city; or still attacked another home- house. And every time I heard bad news. And there was no choice. We have to continue this life because it was our country.

In this quote two elements emerge. First the “shock” Umit receives as Afghanistan is “completely different” from Iran. Second the “bad news” and “killing” and “attacks” that he hears all the time. Firstly, Umit highlights a “considerable difference” between life in Iran and Afghanistan. He emphasizes this through repetition, and by providing an emotional cue: shock. Just after he explains the insecurity and violence in Afghanistan implying a difference in the level of safety between the two countries. However the “considerable difference” seems not to lie solely on this point as he later highlights that he “missed Iran”. This reveals a certain emotional attachment to the country in which he “grew up”. We thus understand that the “considerable difference” may also refer to differences in culture or way of life. Although this it is not stated clearly, the emotions he depicts provide a clue. However, to clearly understand this point it is important to have good background knowledge of the situation of Afghans in Iran. Indeed Koepke (2011) highlights that over half of the Afghan population in Iran was born there, that they are well integrated in the labor market, although many illegally, that they speak perfect Farsi. Subsequently it becomes more difficult to repatriate them to Afghanistan as they have largely integrated Iran’s culture and way of life; they have better economic opportunities in Iran, and sometimes face prejudice upon their return to Afghanistan. We can thus infer that Umit feels a stronger affinity and affiliation to Iran, although he is originally Afghan. This is confirmed when he says: “I missed Iran and I was un-appreciate it, Afghanistan”.

Secondly Umit highlights the unrest in Afghanistan. He talks of “hearing bad news”. Although he does not mention clear political event, he depicts a general insecurity. He does so by providing examples in the form of small individual stories. In the initial story these examples depict either the ambient criminality by staging acts of robbery and violence or the discrimination and violence perpetrated by the Taliban thereby depicting the ethnic and religious violence. Following the examples he usually makes a consequential remark highlighting the point of these small stories. For example after having depicted two stories of violent robberies he explains: “There is, in Afghanistan

there is no justice, there is no fair. So I thought myself I couldn't take- I couldn't continue with this situation.”

The way Umit depicts Afghanistan is important as it helps justify his decision to return to Iran. The emphasis is particularly placed on the insecurity and lack of destination in Afghanistan. It thereby portrays his departure again as motivated by the negative circumstances, although unlike the departure from Iran it is not ‘forced’ by the state’s administration. Moreover as we later learn, his return to Iran is illegal so this move appears to be a strategy to find safety and stability in a more familiar place.

1.3.5 Hazara Discrimination

Following his announcement in the story of his departure back to Iran and the general situation in Afghanistan, Umit delves more specifically into the issues he identifies in Afghanistan which ‘forced’ him to leave. According to Umit “In Afghanistan there is two problems.” One is discrimination because of his “race” which is Hazara, the other is religion. The threats linked to his belonging to the Hazara ethnic group are mainly outlined in the narrative responding to my initial question.

Interestingly he depicts the actual search for the reasons he must depart from Afghanistan:

So when I came back to Iran I checked how it, why I have to leave from this country, or why our destination is this. I started to study some books and I speak with some people. And some of my friends were teacher in University. And after that I understood many things, many things.

This quote demonstrates that Umit does not identify the issues in relation to personal experience but rather through an active ‘documented’ search. This transpires in his presentation of the issues which highlight historical examples of persecution as well as examples related to current events or reports from acquaintances.

Although Umit seems to use the terms “ethnic” and “race” interchangeably, he actually begins by depicting the issue as racial. He describes the Hazara as the only group amongst the four ethnic groups composing Afghanistan which presents different physical features, features that resemble rather East-Asians. According to him this renders them recognisable and thus an easy alibi: “And because of their face this is just alibi to other people to abuse us. And attack us during the war.”

He goes on to argue that this discrimination is a historical issue, and provides some current events such as bomb explosions or attacks that involved the killing of Hazara. However the references to these current events do not contain the necessary details to identify the exact events nor whether the attacks were specifically geared at Hazara. Moreover he mentions several examples

of situations in which Hazara are discriminated such as access to employment or harassment by Pashtun when travelling. Finally he also highlights that Hazara traditionally belong to the Shia branch of Islam in a country predominantly Sunni. The Hazara thus also face threats from 'others' such as the Taliban regarding their religious affiliation. Umit's depiction of the discrimination faced by Hazara is not framed to convince the listener of specific facts. Rather it serves to paint a general picture of the Hazara's situation as one of the 'problems' in Afghanistan that contributed to his departure. Discrimination provides meaning for Umit and helps explain to the listener but mostly to himself why he had to depart from Afghanistan.

The details he provides enable to understand his story but they do not provide information for his individual case which is required by the procedure. Indeed much later in the interview he notices that the Hazara situation is not sufficient for Switzerland to grant asylum: "...really we have problem in Afghanistan. But it's not important for Switzerland. In Switzerland just, I don't know how they judge?"

1.3.6 Religion

In his initial narrative, Umit does not expand on the topic of religion. He does however mention it as one of the two main problems of Afghanistan and the listener is quickly informed of his judgment as he asserts that: "when I study about this [religion] I understood that religion is just bullshit". A little later he explains the issues this causes:

And because I understood that Islam is wrong, I'm not a Muslim anymore. When the people ask me: "Why you are not praying?" or "Why you, you not make Ramadan?" [...] I couldn't say that I'm not Muslim anymore. I just say "Later I will pray, later I will..." I couldn't do this anymore. I want to go a country that I could have more freedom, that I do everything that myself want, not other people want.

He highlights that he cannot be open about his atheism and states that this limits his freedom. He does not explain here however why asserting his non-religiosity may be a problem but comes back to it later in the interview. We can nonetheless infer that social pressure plays a strong role in the feeling of obligation to follow the precepts of Islam as he talks of "the people" who ask him. Later in the interview he repeats the same example adding that: "They [other people] interfere in everything. And what should I told them, that I am not anymore Muslim?"

He goes on to explain a law in Islam that condemns to death people who are "not Muslim anymore" framing this religion issue not only as a matter social pressure but as a real threat. His presentation makes the threat appear as arising from Islam in general. However he does identify the Taliban and "religious leaders" as the main advocators of such obligations through the examples he

provides. He clearly frames this religious pressure as one of the main reasons for his departure initially from Afghanistan, and later from “the area” in general as exemplified by the following quote: “And I got angry and I say: “Why I have to obey this religious leader.” And I wanted to somehow escape from this area, this religious people. Because I don't want to be religious anymore.”

1.3.7 Facing an impasse

Umit's story leads very well towards what we can term the ‘point of the story’. Indeed, his narrative develops to frame an impasse which ultimately leads him to leave. He explicitly states this impasse twice towards the end of his story. The first time it remains relatively vague and in broad lines, though of course we have already been acquainted with his life story and issues hence it is easily apprehensible:

And because in Iran I didn't- I was born in Iran and I had no any rights. Even I couldn't continue my study. And in Afghanistan the situation was unease as the same as this. So I decided to go in another country.

Following this first statement he delves into a short story depicting the life of one of his relatives who was constrained his entire life to move between Iran and Afghanistan. He frames this pendulum as something undesirable. Finally, he concludes his story:

I'm not, I don't have any identity card in Iran. And always frighten that one day Iran, Iran polizei will arrest me and in a very bad way will deport me in Afghanistan. And in Afghanistan again I'm in dangerous and there is no future and destination. So I decided to go in another country that I could have a better destination. So I came to Switzerland.

1.4 Conceptions of asylum and the procedure

When I ask Umit: “Did you know about asylum seeking?” his initial answer is: “No. I didn't know anything.” But then he goes on to mention the United Nations' law in a way that seems to correspond to the definition of refugee comprised within the Geneva Convention:

And I saw, and I read about United Nation laws about asylum seeker that was proceed in 1979 and 1963 about, that a person because of his ethnic or his religion or his idea his life is in danger in his homeland, these countries that signature this law should give him asylum and I thought with myself: yes in Afghanistan because of my ethnic I'm in dangers, because of my face I'm very soon recognizable, and also my religion [...]

He makes a direct link between this notion of asylum and his case naming both ethnic and religious issues which he highlighted earlier on in his personal narrative. This link is made even more explicitly later on in the interview:

I was seeking about some information in internet. And I found United Nation law in internet, in Farsi and in English also. And I study that. I thought that "yes, this is exactly what my problem. And because of my ethnic and my religion and so I can ask for asylum seeker, because I'm in danger, my life is in danger in my country and in Iran.

These quotes are interesting to highlight for they reveal that the plot of his life narrative is based on this initial notion of asylum. Coming back to his first answer to my question (namely that he didn't know anything), it reveals a distinction between the notion of asylum he forged initially when he encountered and interpreted the legal definition himself and the notion that he was confronted with during the procedure. As we shall later see he realizes that his story does not correspond to the requirements that constitute a refugee according to the administrative and legally defined notion, particularly the individual character of the persecution. He nonetheless maintains his narrative in congruence to his original conception of refugeehood. This demonstrates that he deems his own conception to provide a more adequate and truthful meaning to his story. And indeed, he amounts "making a case" to lying.

1.4.1 "Making a case" or Lying

Umit realizes that his story as he tells it is not what the administration want to hear during the first audition:

And as I told you I didn't know anything about asylum procedure, asylum seeker in here. So when in the first camp they ask me, [...] the judge ask me "why you came here?" I told her that "because in Afghanistan there is war and there is discrimination". But she told me "no, I mean what is your personal problem?" But I told her that "I don't have personal problem". And after that I understand what it means [he laughs]. And now I saw that every person they make a personal problem for himself.

This quote depicts the interaction that occurred during his first audition (the summary audition). The interviewer attempts to know what his "personal problem" is, for the interpretation of the notion of refugee contained in the law requires that the individual is personally persecuted. However Umit does not know this hence he answers: "I don't have a personal problem". Rather he focuses on the general situation of war and discrimination to justify his migration which corresponds to his own interpretation of the definition of refugee. Only later probably by talking to other asylum seekers does he realize that "every person they make a personal problem for himself". Umit clearly amounts the "making of a personal problem" as lying and provides many examples of lies of others and what they gained with these lies.

Because I didn't know anything about these things I said everything right. And I thought with myself because of United Nation law, I have right to ask for asylum. But now I understood that- [Me: *it wasn't the case*] -no. I should make a lie, so many lie. And all of them they make some lie.

Umit's narrative reveals a great deal of distress as he believes he will get a negative response because he did not "make a case". He provides examples in which the protagonists are rewarded for their lies, for example by accessing schooling because they claim being under 18. Whereas he is sure that he will receive a negative decision because he did not "make a case". He makes a particularly poignant assertion concerning his view of the Swiss asylum procedure: "But you know, this system, maybe Switzerland system or asylum system make people force to make lie." This quote reveals Umit's perception that in order to access the benefits of the asylum system, whether one is deserving or not, one is compelled to lie!

1.4.2 Network and knowledge

Umit's initial answer to my question: "Did you know about asylum seeking?" demonstrates his identification of the importance of networks for acquiring knowledge of the procedure.

No. I didn't know anything. If I know something that now I know it was too much better. Because some people they came here they have some friends or some families, their brother or their family they are here. And they told them what to do, and what to say, and what something such as this. But I didn't know anything about these things because I have no friend in Europe or any other countries. So I just think with myself I have to escape from Iran and Afghanistan.

Umit makes a direct link between network and knowledge, and the need of the former in order to know "what to do and what to say". As has already been highlighted he perceives that it is necessary to lie in the procedure in order not to be rejected. Hence knowledge of the procedure becomes crucial in order to be able to "make a case". This is particularly poignant in the following quote where he reveals he feels "punished" because he told the "truth".

Everyone, because they have the relative or some person in Europe they know how to make a lie. But myself because I didn't know anyone [laughs] I said everything true and till now I am punished because of them and I am sure that I will receive negative.

According to Umit his lack of knowledge concerning the procedure is not only due to the absence of networks or contact in Europe beforehand but also to the speed of his trip: "I came very soon [...] so there was no one to talk with. If I talk with a person now I was going to normal school." His short trip did not enable him to acquire the necessary knowledge during his migratory route.

1.4.3 Discrimination within the procedure

According to Umit's perception there is also a strong discrimination within the asylum procedure in Switzerland in the way cases from different nationalities are evaluated and decided upon. In his view Switzerland does not take decisions based on the case but on the national belonging. He thus asserts: "I think it's not depend on the case. It's depend on race or I think there is a kind of discrimination in Switzerland system also." The strongest example he uses on several occasions throughout the interview is between Afghans and Eritreans:

And I told you that people from Eritrea, they really don't have any problem with ethnic, with religion or with these things just they have dictator maybe they kill 1, 2 or 3 or at least 100 person. But in a country such as Afghanistan we have too much ethnic insecurity, ethnic problem, religion problem. And every day too many people they are killed in Afghanistan. [...] But in Switzerland we didn't receive answer. But people from Eritrea immediately receive answer B Ausweiss, F Ausweiss. Also they don't learn German, they don't work, they don't pay tax. But myself, I try hard to learn German, if I find job I will pay tax. And I don't know why Switzerland judge such as this. It's strange for me.

In this quote he clearly reveals that he considers Eritreans less deserving in terms of the issues they face in their country of origin, and of their involvement in integration. Indeed, he repeatedly depicts Eritreans as profiteers, who live off taxes like parasites. Interestingly this is the type of argument used in anti-immigration discourses geared at asylum seekers and sometimes migrants in general. Umit excludes himself from the objects of such discourses by making a distinction between different groups of asylum seekers, and distancing himself from the profiteers.

1.5 Conclusion

Umit's story is geared at justifying his asylum claim. He does so by plotting his story to depict a situation of impasse in which lack of security and of freedom are combined. He paints the circumstances as offering him little agency to shape his future and he scarcely sees any other solution than to leave. There are two main lines in Umit's plot which lead to the depiction of this situation of deadlock. It appears first through his life trajectory and second in the more general circumstances of insecurity. First, his biography embedded in mobility has for consequence a stronger familiarity and sense of belonging with Iran but no possible legal administrative status in the state. His family's mobility also prevented him to access adequate schooling limiting his educational opportunities and creating a feeling that he has no "destination". Second, Umit highlights broader circumstances that impede his agency and create a sense of imminent danger: the perpetual insecurity in Afghanistan, the discrimination against Hazara and the lack of religious freedom.

The meaning and coherence of Umit's plot – how the themes in his story are structured to justify his asylum claim – are strongly informed by his initial conception of refugeehood (comprised in the Convention of 1951 relating to the status of refugee) and the protection it provides. His narrative clearly demonstrates that according to his first understanding of refugeehood he is liable to seek protection particularly due to the Hazara discrimination and lack of religious freedom. However he is confronted with a different interpretation of the definition during his first audition when he is asked to present his “personal case”. The legal definition is based on specific criteria including the personal character of the persecution. This confrontation between Umit's personal conception of refugeehood and the legal conception creates a strong feeling of inequity. As his initial understanding of refugeehood gives sense to his life and decision to seek asylum, he maintains his feeling of requiring protection. However, the administrative procedure does not acknowledge his narrative; he consequently holds a strong judgment that the procedure requires individuals to lie. He maintains that knowledge of the administrative procedure and the social networks which provide this knowledge are necessary to have a chance in accessing state protection. His lack of knowledge is therefore a principle reason for his most probable rejection.

2. Alex

2.1 Biographical story

Alex is born and grows up in a village in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. He comes from a rich Oromo family that owns a good portion of land. There are military in his region, and as a child he regularly witnesses violence geared particularly at Oromo. He studies in his home village till the 8th grade. As he is an outstanding student his father sends him to an American Adventist school in a larger town of Oromia. There he converts to Christianity coming from a Muslim family. After finishing grade 12 at the Adventist school he moves to Addis Abeba where he begins his studies in medicine. He does not speak the main vernacular language Amharic which he refused to learn by defiance to the regime. In university he is part of a student group that is politically engaged in opposition to the regime and in defense of the rights of the Oromo people. He receives a scholarship to study in Canberra University but does not enjoy the offer as he is arrested in 2007. He is tortured in prison and released in the beginning of 2008. He then spends several months in hospital due to the medical consequences of torture.

In mid-2008 he leaves Ethiopia with his family. They first move to the Kenyan border, but there are Ethiopian military in the region, so his father decides to go to Somalia. Alex who does not want to go to Somalia but to Sudan goes his own way. When he reaches Khartoum he is advised to go to Libya as the Sudanese government has an agreement with Ethiopia to send back people who

are blacklisted. This includes Alex as he finds out in a newspaper. He first attempts to seek protection at a United Nations refugee camp in Sudan, but leaves after 3 days of waiting to no avail. Then on he travels with various smugglers first to Tripoli then by sea to Italy. On the way he is arrested on multiple occasions, and spends some time in hospital too. Before leaving Tripoli he also goes to the United Nations. He receives help to apply for asylum in Canada, but is told he has to wait for a year. He decides to leave Libya to reach Italy.

When he reaches Italy, Alex is immediately sent to hospital. He spends three months in hospital during which he receives a protection status after a summary interview. Once out of hospital he is left to his own device. He goes to Norway where he is treated in hospital again. However according to readmission agreements, Italy is responsible for his case. He is sent back to Italy where he finds himself on the streets again. As his health situation worsens he reaches Switzerland where he receives appropriate treatment. In Switzerland he receives a first summary audition and is not sent back to Italy but to a canton during the time necessary for the examination of his case. He is asked to pass a medical exam at a hospital to prove that he underwent torture. He then receives an invitation for a second audition however the translator does not show up so the audition does not take place. He is then informed that he will not receive a second audition. However, he has been in Switzerland for nearly two years, and is hoping to refile his application according to the policy at the time (possibility to refile an application after the expiration of at least two years of a previous residence permit, Dublin II, EC n°343/2003).

2.2 Alex's life story in two parts

Alex's life story of displacement is not contained within one initial jet but both the first and second answers had to be analyzed individually in order to paint a complete picture. The first question inquired: "I want to know about you. So where you come from, a bit about your family, what you did in your life, what were important things for you, and what led you here, to come to Switzerland." The narrative encompassed in the first answer is relatively short and does not entail a lot of explanatory elements prior to his departure. This first narrative is rather geared at explaining his current situation in terms of location (in Switzerland), administrative status (where he is at in the procedure) and health conditions. This first part is relatively short (spanning from stanza 1 to 90). It is only following my second question that he provides a broader, and longer account of his life even though it is a shorter and more specific question than the first: "Can you tell me a bit more about your childhood, family?". Here his answer (which spans from stanza 91 to 641) includes a broad range of events and topics, including a detailed account of his trip from Ethiopia till Europe. The second question may thus be conceived mainly as a trigger for him to pursue in his storytelling rather

than an initiating or probing question. He answers following mainly my introductory question. His first answer can be termed his 'asylum narrative' and his second answer his 'life narrative'. This distinction enables to highlight the emphasis he places in each response although his full personal narrative encompasses both. The following two sections will outline the plots in each narrative respectively.

2.2.1 The asylum narrative

Alex's first answer can be divided into three parts: first an introduction, then a recounting of his movements within Europe and finally an account of his current administrative situation. The topic of his health condition spans through all three parts and can be argued as being the main theme organizing the plot in this first narrative. In this initial part there is no explicit link made between his life in Ethiopia, what happened there and his asylum application. The link is present implicitly and left to the listener to establish as he paints a picture of hardship, torture, and health issues just before recounting his journey through Europe. Hence this first answer does not play the role of justifying his asylum application. It is focused rather on exposing an account of his movements through different European states which ultimately lead him to Switzerland thereby painting a picture of his current administrative situation.

The introduction of this first answer is composed of a very fast sequentiality of topics (rather than events) which set the scene for what is to come. After announcing that he is an Ethiopian Oromo he informs us: "Oromo is a majority of Ethiopian population but the government they kill us, they take our things, they torture us, like me now." In this quote he jumps from the general context of the Ethiopian government's persecution of Oromo to his specific case and follows on by highlighting his bad medical condition due to the torture he endured. This beginning is a good demonstration of Alex's narrative style. To make the story go forwards he often (not always) uses association of ideas. Consequently there are a lot of flashbacks or diversions from the main plot in which he expands on diverse topics. This renders his narrative particularly difficult to analyze in terms of what happened because crucial information are sometimes provided only later on. In this beginning for example he does not inform us about the events that led him to be tortured. The only reason he provides is the general persecution of Oromo by the Ethiopian government. We learn only in his second response that he was engaged in political or civic activities for the "freedom of Oromo". What this narrative style achieves is to provide the listener with information concerning the importance he attributes to different elements of his story. For instance in the above example, the choice of order in which he provides the information places a clear emphasis on the general persecution of Oromo by the Ethiopian government rather than his specific involvement in politics.

The second part of Alex's first answer outlines his movements through Europe which ultimately lead him to Switzerland. Interestingly his main motivator when he moves on his own initiative is presented as being his search for adequate medical treatment. As he arrives in Italy he immediately spends three months in hospital and receives papers without a full interview due to his medical condition. But as the following quote seems to imply he does not receive further help once out of hospital: "they give me and they throw me outside." He goes to Norway: "Because of I'm not good for my manage my life because of I'm not healthy person so you know the situation of Italy." Here he presupposes the listener's knowledge of the situation in Italy and leaves it to their imagination. It is accentuated by the use of the verb "throw" which depicts the action as forced and rather violent.

In Norway he receives medical treatment. But he is constrained by the European law as Norway sends him back to Italy (according to the readmission agreements) despite the lack of treatment he received there. His account of this 'forced' return to Italy is notable to highlight: "Ok me I respect law of Europe [...] because I am searching for my life and my health [...] Me I don't want to choose to European country. I need my life, I need for my health." He attempts in these two quotes to present himself as adhering to the European law, that his priority is his health, and because of that he does not want to "choose" a European country. In Italy however he finds himself "on the streets" again, living for a while in a train station, and receiving food once a day from an aid organization. His health condition being dire, another asylum seeker advises him to go to Switzerland.

This leads to the third part of Alex's first answer in which he outlines the procedure he underwent in Switzerland and then the treatment he received. He particularly praises the treatment he receives in Switzerland from Doctor A.: "I'm very happy for Swiss. I would like to say for all Switzerland is god bless. What I want to say for my life, because of if I don't find this place today I already lost my life." It is at this point that he presents his administrative situation comparing the value of a paper and of life: "Because the important is my life. Behind my life is the document. If I don't live they give me document is nothing for me." Here again as with his transfer from Norway to Italy he puts a stronger value on his life and health than on his administrative situation. This enables to focus on the positive aspect of his current situation, the good medical treatment he is receiving, rather than the uncertainty with regards to his administrative status. As we shall see however this value judgment becomes more ambiguous later in the story.

Finally it is relevant to note that at the end of this first narrative he mentions God when praising his treatment by doctor A.: "I am standing by God, under God by him [doctor A.]." God is a topic which becomes essential later in the interview for he evaluates him as the ultimate explanation

for what happens. This reveals an important value of Alex, who presents God as playing a role in his life story and understands him as being behind occurrences. God is not a causal element, but rather a source for understanding why things happen.

2.2.2 The life narrative

Alex introduces his second response with the following announcement: “I lost my family 2008, June 29,” marking this fact as important. However the importance of it only becomes apparent much later in the interview when he complains about not being able to go look for his family. He then delves into his life narrative recounting his life prior to his departure from Ethiopia. And goes on to retrace in great detail his trip which ultimately leads him to Italy by sea. Throughout the retelling of his trip he makes diversions and flashbacks to highlight aspects of his life in Ethiopia or to expand on certain topics. He ends this second response by delving into various topics, most notably God’s role in his life and his story. Finally he concludes: “My story is very big. You don’t have time to hear all, to tell you is very difficult.”

Painting Alex’s life story in broad strokes three main structuring episodes emerge: his political activism, his arrest and torture, and his departure from Ethiopia. His political activism is the direct cause of his arrest and consequent departure. Three preeminent levels of explanations account for these broad lines and for the more minor events and occurrences that structure the narrative. First the persecution of Oromo people provides the general context in which the story unfolds. Secondly there is a more specific context: his education, intelligence and his family circumstances. Thirdly, God is employed as more metaphysical but nonetheless real explanation for happenings in his life. His poor medical condition also plays a role in his story, as throughout his trip he is sent to hospital on numerous occasions, and seems to receive more attentive care due to his dire state. The following section will outline these three themes, how they are broached in the story and the role they play in the plot.

2.3 Themes

2.3.1 The ‘persecution’ of Oromo

Umit begins the interview by announcing that he is Oromo, and that “the government they kill us, they take our things, they torture us like me now”. This is a notable quote told right at the beginning of the interview as he does not frame himself as a particular case but rather as an example of the general treatment of Oromo by the Ethiopian government. He talks of “us” (Oromo) before talking of himself, thereby underlining a strong identification with the plight of the Oromo people. Indeed his entire story is marked by this identification as Oromo and the antagonism with what can be named

“the regime”. Whereas in his first response – his asylum seeking story – the main themes netting the plot together are his medical condition and European law, in the second response his Oromo belonging marks the principle plot line. Indeed all of the three episodes – his political activism, his arrest and his departure from Ethiopia – find an explanation in the general context of the regime’s persecution of Oromo people.

More so than nationality, Oromo appears in Alex’s story to be his main community of identification. He talks of the Oromo as “my people”. Against the people he identifies an oppressor thereby creating a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and reifying the Oromo as a group. The oppressor takes on different faces throughout the story: the government, the Amhara, the military. They nonetheless constitute one entity. On the one hand Alex’s cause for the freedom is framed as singularly pitted against this other. His resistance is ultimately for the “freedom of the Oromo people” from this oppressor. On the other hand, each term he uses for this other is linked to each other rendering distinctions blurry.

In the beginning of the story and then throughout the narrative the oppressor is most often simply “the government”. When he talks of the Oromo’s land however he specifies that the oppressor is the military. The following quote demonstrates the blurred lines between the military and the government. Moreover it is particularly representative of the way in which he pits the government against the Oromo painting one as the perpetrator and the other as the victim, the analogy of the dog amplifying the picture:

When I'm small I see my land. They took- a military come to take by force the things of our farmer from my neighbour, from my uncle. Just like Neuchatel town. The military come to punish the people. I am very little. I worried about that when the beated all the people and my mum, my dad, all my brother, my sisters, they beated small baby. I see it. My mind is not accept it. Why they do the government, why? You know they treated as dog, dog is no respect in Afrik but dog is respect more than man here. Everybody beat dog in Afric. They treated as a dog for Oromo people you know.

This quote also points to Alex’s use of “the government” as a generic term as he shifts from “the military” to “the government” to “they”. Throughout the story “the government” is used to signify all governmental institutions. Moreover this quote clearly distinguishes the government from the Oromo implying that Oromo people are not included in “the government” and thus do not hold positions of power in which they may have a voice in determining how they are ruled. Rather in this quote he clearly vilifies the government and victimizes the Oromo, a process of antagonisation which he employs from the beginning of the story. The generic use of the term government is recurrent throughout the story. For example when he talks of the “Swiss government” he signifies the migration office: “I am speak my true, my honest things to Swiss government.”

The government is hence referred to by Alex as a homogenous, singular entity, attached to a state that has power over him. In Ethiopia it is the power to arrest and torture him. In Europe it is the power to determine whether he will be able to remain (in Norway or currently in Switzerland), and the power to provide him or not with the necessary medical aid to continue his life. Hence in general in Alex's story, governments are entities that shape his fate and limit his freedom. This lack of freedom is explicit and apparent in the case of the government of Ethiopia as he is arrested and spends time in prison where he is subjected to torture. But he also words this infringement to freedom implicitly concerning Europe for example by making an analogy with the prison. The following quote makes reference to his lack of a stable situation in Europe for which he blames the European governments:

European even again they put me in torture. I'm not happy each day of my life. It is a risk life for me. Even, you know I feel, when I go back my room, I feel like prison. Very big prison.

Coming back to the Ethiopian government, it is relevant to note that Alex attributes to it an ethnic character, for example when he delves into the question of the land:

So is from many years they [Alex's family] fighting about that you know, freedom of our land. Because of government he said you come from Kenya, ethnic of Kenya, Oromo Kenya, and you have to go back, you have to leave Ethiopia land. We are 44 million of Ethiopian population, how to come from another. We are...we are the first of land of Ethiopia is Oromo people. Adis Abeba is call is... before is for Oromo Chinchine. We are the rich people. And they manage to grow our capital, the Amara and the Tigre and another ethnic is come our place, to control.

In this quote Alex provides some historical elements to argue for the case of Oromo people. The issue here is which ethnic group has "control" over the territory and is legitimate to do so. It is the only time that Alex mentions the Tigre people, the main predicament framed as originating from the Amhara. This ethnic issue becomes more apparent later, when he refuses to learn Amharic:

But me, when the teacher is come to teach the Amharic I don't want to learn. Because I see what the Amhara people is cut le bras of women of Oromo. Cut the hand of armies of Oromo man. [...] I read the history. Because of that I don't want to learn this language. I want to grow my ethnic. I want to grow my language. Of Oromo only.

What is important to retain from these two quotes is that Alex frames the Oromo issue not only as one opposing the Oromo and the government, but also as an ethnic issue in which the Oromo people are the victims. He uses history to back up his claim concerning the ethnic character of the conflict. This mix of ethnicity and history reflects a more general Oromo nationalist discourse (Jalata, 1995). It

is in his way of framing the issue – in terms of persecution of the Oromo people by the government – that Alex justifies his political activism. By framing the issue as an ethnic one, his fight for freedom takes on the shape of a refusal to accept Amharic. As we already know, he refuses to learn the language. But he goes further by calling out to other students not to accept the Amharic hegemony. And it is this fight which ultimately leads him to his arrest.

2.3.2 Political engagement

Alex's political engagement does not only find meaning in the general context of what I have called the 'Oromo persecution', but finds more specific contextual explanations notably within his childhood, his family circumstances and his education. Through these different explanations his fight for the freedom of the Oromo appears to be an intrinsic part of his personal identification and hence an unavoidable one.

Alex recalls acts of violence against the Oromo in his childhood, situating his grievance early on in his life. In a quote presented above when he describes how the military came to punish the people when he was small, he already announces:

I am very little. I worried about that when the beated all the people and my mum, my dad, all my brother, my sisters, they beated small baby. I see it. My mind is not accept it. Why they do the government, why?

And he follows on by explaining:

I will be one day maybe a - my dream is to - to study well and to ask the right of- the freedom right. I wanted to fight for the freedom. When I'm young my dream is need to fight for freedom.

Already when he was small his mind could not accept the situation and he was dreaming to fight for freedom. He thereby situates his political consciousness as originating within his childhood. By doing so, Alex frames this consciousness as being part of who he is: it is part of his nature as his "mind" could not accept it, and part of his early desires as his "dream" was for freedom. That he later takes an active role in this fight thus appears as normal and inevitable in the narrative.

This necessity of Alex's role in the students' demands for autonomy also appears in the way he frames himself as intelligent and educated. From the beginning of the story he highlights that he was a particularly intelligent child, and coming from a wealthy family he was thus able to attend an excellent high school. It is his education which leads him to his interest in civic action and politics as he presents it in the following quote when depicting his experience in high school:

and I get more educated open mind. And then I read too much about politics. I like civic, you know civic?" Me: "civic involvement". Alex: "Civic politics. So...I, I like already politics. I all time need to know about politics. About freedom of my people.

In this quote, it appears that Alex amounts politics to "freedom of his people". Hence in his story, his education and schooling play an important role in enabling him to understand and frame the Oromo issue and hence the desire for freedom. Later at university it is his intelligence and the fact that he is a top student that explain his student following: "All of the university. All of the school eu..student is follow me. Because of I'm the top student."

Alex's education and intelligence is however not the only explanation for his involvement in the fight for Oromo freedom. His family's circumstances also play an important role, most probably a crucial one in accounting for the way in which he frames the issue. He recounts that his grandfather refused to pay governmental taxes for the land, a family tradition which his father perpetuated and which Alex identifies as an act for the freedom of the Oromo land:

My grandfather decided we don't have to pay, taxes. You know taxes government. [...] We don't pay this thing. Now they kill for that reason you know. So we don't pay tax. So is from many years they fighting about that you know, freedom of our land.

Alex also narrates his sister's political engagement and how he followed up on her.

Because before my sister is connection [with Oromo people in Norway, Australia, America, everywhere]. After my sister is died, I take it that place. My sister is she's younger than me, but she don't know about pol- eu, she don't know how I know politics. How to analyse the politics. She don't know. I know very well. She all times ask me. I'm very young. I know how to write something. I know how to talk something.

It thus seems from Alex's story that he came from a family who was active in resisting against governmental oppression. From his account of his sister's engagement we may infer that she played an important role in introducing Alex into a certain political engagement, asking him to "analyse the politics" and probably to write and talk as well.

These three elements – Alex's childhood, his family circumstances and his education – combine together to provide a more specific context for Alex's political engagement. They do not function in the narrative to provide a justification but rather an explanation for his activism. Indeed, they enable the listener to understand how he builds meaning out of his circumstances and experiences to construe a coherent story – one in which resistance against the government and fight for Oromo freedom function as a red thread.

2.3.3 God

Alex's narrative also contains an important explicative element that we can situate on a metalevel: God. As he explains, Alex comes from a Muslim family but converts to Christianity during his highschool (he attended a Christian school). Throughout his story he regularly highlights the role God plays in determining events. Particularly notable is the explanatory power Alex attributes to God when events seem marked by an unusual amount of luck. During his trip two such examples stand out. First when he and his companions are caught by the police in Libya, they are all beaten up but Alex is rather sent to hospital because of his poor health situation. Second when he crosses the sea by boat many die along the way but Alex despite his poor health reaches Italy. In both cases it is the protection of God that account for his safety. The role of God's protection is particularly notable in the following quote in which he explains why he is still in Switzerland after two years despite having his fingerprint in Italy:

I pray to my lord. I am tired of life. I am tired of situation. Please mercy with me to remain this land. God is hearing me to I am here, even today I'm here. The guys come with me all are sending back to Italy. Nobody is no remaining there. I am here because of who. Because of god. Not because of me. Because of not my special case. Because of only god is said. Because of only god is said, I am here my sister.

This quote points to two additional elements concerning Alex's explanatory utilization of God. Firstly God protects him because he prays to God. Secondly he places God above other explanations. Alex portrays an image of himself as being pious and virtuous. Each time he highlights that God protects him he also stresses that he prays to God implying that it is because of his devotion that God hears him. However he goes further in this link with the following small story in which he accentuates the "good" things he did as a child:

God he love me. You know when I'm small times. I do good things for god. What I do my dad is very rich. In neighbor is very poor our land. The- My dad they don't want to give things to the poorness. Me I ask all times god my dad to help this poorness please. Give the food.

This small story appears as he is recounting his trip through the desert. The switch from the main narrative to the role of God is particularly notable as it demonstrates how he attributes meaning to his survival. Moreover, this switch is representative of the sequentiality in Alex's story in which he alternates very quickly between biography and explanation: "23 days I am been in desert. A lot of Somalian is died. [tut sound] God he love me."

Alex also sometimes places God above other explanations providing an important clue as to his understanding of the world and the importance of religion for him. In the above quote he argues

that he is not 'here' (i.e. in Switzerland) because of his special case but because of God. He believes that it is not Swiss or European law (which he attributes to the state) that provides his protection but first and foremost God, who appears in this quote to have a stronger power than state law. This placement of God above other explanations recurs numerous times in the narrative. For example when depicting his medical treatment in Switzerland he mentions: "I am standing by god, under god by him [Doctor A]."

2.4 Conceptions of asylum and the procedure

2.4.1 Perception refugeehood before fleeing

Analysing Alex's story, it does not seem that he had a notion of asylum or refugeehood prior to his trip through Sudan and Libya. If he did he chooses not to mention it in his narrative. When he depicts fleeing with his family, he does not provide a direct explanation. However, the listener can assume from the particularly fast sequentiality that the principle reason is his arrest. "I'm be university, so 2006. A. university. 2007 I'm in prison. 2008 around February I go out of prison. So...2008 June I left my country. I am here now."

On a broader level we can infer that the main driver for the departure was the persisting danger following his political activism and his arrest. We learn a little later that they fled the country in a period of instability, hence his individual acts are not the only motive: "That time eu..you know the government is really very bad situation. Everybody decided to escape it." That his departure is mainly focused on fleeing danger seems to be confirmed by the uncertainty of the final destination. Indeed the family first heads towards Kenya, but the danger there pushes the father to decide to move on to Somalia while Alex resolves rather on Sudan. What is relevant to retain from this episode is that there is not yet a notion of 'right to protection' or a search for this protection but a flight from danger and pursuit of safety. Hence at this point of the story the migration seems motivated by an instinct of survival with no planned destination.

2.4.2 Perception of refugeehood during the journey

During his travel first through Sudan and then Libya Alex attempts twice to acquire a refugee protection from the United Nations. The first time is in Sudan when he realises that he is also in danger in the country and is advised to leave. But Alex says: "I want to go to United Nation. I want to refugee." This quote reveals that Alex conceives of "refugee" as something he can acquire at the UN. Hence he does not perceive himself as a refugee simply by virtue of his situation of flight from political persecution. Rather it is an administrative category provided by the United Nations.

The second time Alex turns to the United Nations is in Libya when again he realises that the danger is persistent. He is advised to reach Italy by boat, but is afraid of the sea. Here according to his narrative the UN provides him with medical care and files an application to Canada. This is somewhat his first asylum application although he does not use the term. He depicts how he tells them “everything” and provides them with documents notably concerning his application to an exchange program in Australia. However he is told he has to wait for a full year, a time period which Alex deems too long in light of the lack of security he perceives in Libya.

Two aspects in Alex’s narration of his decisions to ‘move on’ during his trip are particularly relevant to emphasize. When he depicts his departure from Sudan Alex mentions: “Me, I only want to arrive to- I need to arrive to Sudan, not about Libya, about Europe. I am not imagine nothing I tell you the true.” Here he argues that his final destination had been Sudan and that he never imagined going to Libya or Europe. This accentuates the involuntary character of his movements and the fact that they were motivated by the circumstantial lack of safety. That he places such an emphasis at this point of the story seems to indicate that he is distancing himself from current public criticism against asylum. The particular criticism at hand is that asylum seekers ‘choose’ the country in which they want to seek protection (Zimmermann, 2010). This particular inference can be made in light of an argument he voices right at the beginning of the interview: “Me I don't want to choose to European country. I need my life, I need for my health.” This is a clear example demonstrating that his knowledge of such criticism against asylum seekers impacts the way he frames his story.

2.4.3 Conception of asylum

Alex’s conception of asylum appears at the beginning of the interview in his first response. Indeed as has already been partially explained, this first response is focused on outlining his journey through Europe with the point of exposing his administrative situation. Alex’s conception of asylum is thus linked to his situation in Europe and we can presuppose that most of his knowledge and experience of this legal category of refuge is acquired once in Europe. Indeed, when recounting events prior to his arrival in Switzerland he does not mention asylum or protection, but the narrative is rather geared around his quest for safety. When he is in Europe, his story shifts focus to notions of protection.

In his first response Alex’s conception of protection revolves around his “life and health”. He seeks protection in the form of medical treatment and help to “manage his life”. As has already been explored when exposing his life story, his movements are motivated by the search for this adequate “life and health” protection. When he finds himself on the streets in Italy he first moves to Norway and then to Switzerland. This protection is limited by the European legislation, as he experiences

when he is sent back from Norway to Italy despite the better treatment and living conditions in the former. Protection is thus framed in this first part as situated between the (uneven) treatment and living conditions provided by European states and the European legislation. However, he also highlights that: “the important is my life. Behind my life, is the document. If I don't live they give me document is nothing for me.” Hence in his first response he places a higher value on his health than on acquiring a stable legal status. He highlights explicitly his thankfulness to Switzerland for providing him protection in the form of good medical help. This notion of protection however becomes more nuanced and ambiguous in the latter part of the interview particularly when he delves into his personal experience of asylum in Europe.

2.4.4 Life in asylum

In the latter part of the interview Alex draws a very negative picture of his experience as an asylum seeker. This is rendered particularly explicitly in the following quote:

I don't like asile. Who is like? I don't like. I like never. My dream is not to come to asile. My dream I become to specialist doctor. To help the patient around the world. My dream is that. My dream is to freedom of Oromo people one day. My dream is not asile like this. Asile is you know meaningless life. Life is like nothing. Because I eat, I sleep. What is my life now?

For Alex living as an asylum seeker is meaningless. Indeed, he is not able to pursue his ambition of becoming a doctor and of fighting for the freedom of Oromo, the latter being particularly heavy. This is understandable considering that his life story mainly revolves around this aspiration for Oromo freedom. This meaninglessness also derives from the lack of recognition he receives in Europe. In Ethiopia he clearly acquired recognition not only through his success in his studies but also through his political engagement as testified by the student following he depicts in his story. In Europe however he becomes an asylum seeker. He is recognised according to a mere administrative category in which many rights are denied and he depends on the migration administration to acquire a more stable situation.

Alex provides a strong depiction of the suffering he experiences by being an asylum seeker and the circumstances imposed by this situation. Despite meeting people, he feels alone because he perceives that others cannot understand his case or misunderstand him when he tries to explain. As highlighted above he does not have any activities through which he can acquire recognition. In this regard he expresses the wish that “Switzerland” (a term he uses to refer to the authorities) gives him a job, whatever it is. And most poignant is the situation of waiting, of not receiving a response and not knowing the future:

I am man to live in this world, so I don't know my future. I want to know. I'm not getting younger, I'm getting older. My mind is going down, and down each day of my life. Because now I think too much about my paper, too much about my life in future.

This quote reveals an impression stemming from Alex's story that his situation is causing him great distress. He uses particularly strong metaphors to express the emotional evaluation of his circumstances. Notably, he compares his situation to torture and prison, which he experienced first-hand in Ethiopia.

Some place is- for the second prison for me. I feel like prison. What kind of prison you know. In Addis Abeba I don't see light. I don't go out from the room of underground. But this is like big prison for me, another torture. I don't know how, whom I right in Europe. If I understand before the human right of warred- of warred right, Europe human right. And like in 1951, Geneva Convention made the right of human beings, if it is like this I can fight with Ethiopian government.

Moreover this quote reveals his conception of the role of the asylum legislation in Europe, that it constitutes a human right and a protection for people escaping war. However, it also stands as a notable criticism against the way this right is applied. The claim made here is that had he understood before the human rights in Europe, he would have stayed to fight the Ethiopian government. This assertion remains on the level of evaluation however. The analysis above has revealed that in practice he is conscious of the danger he faces in Ethiopia not only in terms of persecution but also simply in terms of access to the necessary medical aid.

2.4.5 Conception of the procedure and his personal case

Alex asserts when talking about his case: "this problem is coming not from me, from....problem of my politics, and problem of my government." This quote demonstrates that in his narrative Alex does not place the emphasis on his personal political action ("the problem is coming not from me") but on the government. Without the persecution of the government his political engagement would not have had the same meaning nor the same consequences. As has been demonstrated in the analysis, this focus on the general context is perceptible in the beginning and throughout his story. He regards the persecution of the Oromo by the government as a contextual element that predisposes his acts of opposition and the consequences of these acts. Even though he does recount his personal trajectory in terms of his political activism, this activism is geared at a common cause: the freedom of the Oromo. Moreover he places the violence he endured in a context of generalized violence against Oromo, hence his case is not particular. It is not his specific actions that are relevant but rather the injustices endured by the Oromo in general. This focus in his story reveals that the conflict between

the government and the Oromo provides more meaning when framing his narrative than his personal activism.

What he conceives as constituting the particularity of his case and the reason for which he requires protection is his health condition. This is notably revealed in his justification for dissimulating from the Swiss government his “Italian fingerprint”. Indeed by fear of being deported back to Italy he attempts to conceal from the Swiss authorities that he has already filed an application in Italy. The justification for this lie is his health condition as he did not receive treatment in Italy:

Me I tell in in my life the truth. The first time I am lying little bit to Swiss government. But they ask me why you say that. Because of my situation I say that. Because I am a man to near die I have to protect myself. I am- it is my lying is not criminal. I am not done any mistake in Europe country.

In this quote he also attempts to distance himself from his ‘lie’ by highlighting his good conduct in Europe. He takes on a defensive speech demonstrating that he is conscious of the detriment his lie can cause to his application. Indeed, we later learn that the administration demands a justification for this lie and requires a medical proof of his torture.

2.5 Conclusion

The analysis of Alex’s interview led to two narratives that can be distinguished notably in terms of plot, purpose and self-presentation. The first is the asylum narrative which seeks to justify his application in Switzerland by explaining his asylum trajectory. The plot is structured by his movements through several European states as he struggles between his medical needs and the restrictions of the European law. His travels are either motivated by his search for better medical aid when he cannot receive it or forced upon him when the states send him back to the responsible country (i.e. Italy) according to the readmission agreement . The focus is on his need for protection in terms of his health condition which he places prior to his administrative situation.

The second narrative is his life story before his arrival in Europe. This narrative is not focused on justifying his asylum claim but is rather geared at explaining his fight for Oromo freedom although this element does ultimately lead to his departure. His self-presentation in the story is marked by a strong identification with the Oromo ethnic group and an appraisal of this Oromo identity. Moreover the Oromo identity is enmeshed in a struggle against the predominantly Amhara government identified as a source of persecution. Alex’s political engagement hence appears as necessary in terms of his self-identification. His activism is further supported by his personal history, his childhood, family circumstances and education all presented as playing an important role leading to his interest in politics. Alex’s arrest and torture confirm the violence inflicted by the government on

the Oromo thereby justifying his activism. However this also has for consequence the need for safety which pushed him and his family to leave Ethiopia. That his life story is geared not at justifying his asylum application but rather his political activism and consequent search for safety reveals the particularly strong relevance Alex attributes to Oromo freedom in framing his story and his identity.

Looking closer at the differences between the two narratives enables to provide some explanation as to why they are so clearly distinguishable. The main novelty is that Alex acquires a notion of asylum and the procedure only once in Europe. This is significant notably in the shift from a search for safety to the need for protection. These two elements differ in the space they offer for agency and self-representation in the narrative. Before his arrival in Europe, although he does not control the circumstances which lead to his arrest and torture, he takes action in his fight for Oromo freedom and then in his search for safety. He maintains agency and meaning in his life. Once in Europe however he is dependent on the European and the states' legislation for protection. Although he attempts to take agency with regards to his health provisions, he is dependent on the states' evaluation of his situation. He thus needs to emphasise his poor health condition and his dependency on adequate medical aid to justify his movements through Europe. Interestingly his medical needs lead him to a situation in which it is not his political engagement which serves as a currency for recognition but his health condition. This brings to the forefront his victimization rather than his political agency and is a source of suffering as revealed by his comparison of Europe to a prison and his criticism of human rights. And indeed he highlights that his life as an asylum seeker is meaningless. He can no longer fight for the freedom of Oromo, work towards his dream of becoming a doctor, or engage in a meaningful activity. His life is resumed to convincing the Swiss state of his medical needs.

3. Norbu

3.1 Biographical data

Norbu was born in a small rural village in Tibet near the Nepali border. He comes from an agricultural family which mainly lives off growing crops and herding animals. Until the 6th grade he attends a Tibetan school run by the Chinese administration, and also prepares for a monastic education. When he finishes school his father enrolls him in a monastery where he becomes a monk. During the unrest in 2008, a group of Chinese and Tibetan men come to the monastery to give patriotic education. These patriotic education teams were part of a regular campaign initiated by the Chinese authorities. These focused particularly on monasteries as religious professionals were often targeted as political suspects (Barnett, 2009). During a monastery meeting several monks voice their dissent leading to an escalation of tension with the Chinese officials and the confiscation of mobile phones. In the evening

between twelve and fifteen monks are arrested including Norbu. They are kept at the police station for two to three days. Four of the monks suspected to have initiated the protest are transferred to another prison (although their location remains unknown to Norbu.) The other monks including Norbu are released but are banned for life from attending any monastery in Tibet. Norbu returns to his home. He is then employed in another monastery as a cleaner, caterer and tourist guide at the monastery's hotel and restaurant. The monastery being close to Mount Everest many foreign tourists pass by. He meets an American couple who give him a picture of the Dalai Lama, an item which is prohibited by Chinese law. During a prayer session in his home community, Norbu voices his opinion concerning the political situation in Tibet and calls for support of the Dalai Lama, laying his picture on the shrine. The incident is reported to his father, who decides during the night to send him away from Tibet. Norbu leaves the next day and travels to Kathmandu illegally where he is hosted by a family friend. He then reaches Switzerland with the help of this friend. At the moment of the interview, Norbu has been in Switzerland for a bit more than a year, has had one interview and is waiting for a second (but has not received an invitation yet).

3.2 Life story

Norbu's story as he recounts it is structured around two events. The first one is the incident at the first monastery which leads to the ban from becoming a monk. The second is the main turning point in the story and concerns his voicing of opinions at the community prayer which leads to his departure from Tibet. The rest of the story sets the scene by providing contextual information particularly concerning the general situation under Chinese occupation, and by narrating other events that pave the way for the turning point. The strength of Norbu's story resides in the clear structure of his story and particularly in the way that the various sections link to one another. He recounts the events in chronological order which enabled to easily converge the biographical data with the life story in order to map the narrative. Moreover his story provides a clear account of his motives for seeking asylum.

Interestingly, throughout his story Norbu generally highlights initiators of action external to himself rather than his own decisional role. For example during the monks' dissent he places himself in the general flow of events indicating that he does not initiate the action but rather follows the overall reaction. He thereby shifts some of the responsibility of his acts away from himself diffusing it within the general circumstances. One episode stand out in the narrative in this regard: when Norbu recounts how he voiced his opinion against the Chinese during the prayer session he focuses on his own power to initiate action. This episode presents a strong emotional shift from fear to courage and is revelatory of his strong identification with what he later terms 'the Tibetan cause'.

Two aspects are particularly important to highlight in order to understand how Norbu frames events: the general context of the Chinese occupation and his father's decisional role. Throughout the whole narrative, Norbu repeatedly exposes the situation under Chinese occupation. The main purpose is to provide a context for the following episodes by suggesting a preliminary explanation for actions and their consequences. Indeed all of the actions he depicts relate to the general political situation. There is a constant to and fro between narrative and expository text. This reflects on the one hand the need to provide information to the listener and on the other serves as a kind of justification for his actions. He talks about the situation either in very general terms, highlighting the lack of political, human and religious rights, or by providing more concrete examples.

The father figure is an important theme to highlight for Norbu's father is a strong initiator for action until his departure. Two main episodes are particularly relevant to emphasise. Firstly, Norbu provides two interlinked reasons for becoming a monk, the Tibetan tradition and his father's wish. The latter however is predominant. Norbu's life as a monk is an essential part of the story because it constitutes the precursory circumstances for the events that lead to his departure. Secondly, after Norbu speaks up at the prayer session, it is his father who decides that he must leave despite Norbu's unwillingness. Hence his father's wish is distinguished from his own. Norbu not only accepts his father's decisional power but also expresses strong emotional responses such as his fear of disappointing him.

3.3 Conceptions of asylum and the procedure

It does not seem that Norbu had a clear notion of the asylum procedure before arriving in Switzerland. Indeed once he was obliged to leave, he chose Switzerland over other countries because of the high presence of NGOs, of a large Tibetan community and of the similarities with Tibet rather than going where he "will get the better paper, easy paper". At the moment of the research interview he expresses that he still doesn't know "the system of here in Swiss about this immigration process ... how they deal, how long they take for the interview". However he does hold a notion of the normal procedure, which was not applied to his case. His interview on motives happened after eight months when according to him it should have happened within the first month at the Centre for Registration and Procedure. This reveals that his conception of the procedure remains blurry and that this creates a lot of uncertainty about the proceedings of his case.

This unclarity in the procedure is further highlighted by his conception that luck plays a strong role. He provides an anecdote in which five Tibetans in a similar situation arrive in Switzerland and one gets his papers (his residency permit) whilst the others don't. The following quote demonstrates that he is not aware of the criteria upon which a decision is taken by the

administration. This creates a lack of transparency in which differences between the treatments of cases are explained by luck and thus one's fate seems dependent on coincidence: "So it depends on your luck sometimes you know. They come in same, in the same group and some people got the paper, some people didn't get the paper." However Norbu also remains aware that the Swiss administration plays a strong role in the outcome of his case. When asked about his future he answers:

My life like I said depends on Swiss government. If they decide me to stay here I will have a good life I hope so. If they don't decide I'm like- not let me to stay, then I think my life is end because if I go back to Tibet either Chinese will kill me or put me into life imprisonment you know.

This quote demonstrates that the lack of decision concerning his case creates a lot of uncertainty as to his future. He is clearly afraid of receiving a negative answer and being deported back to Tibet. This fear, the absence of knowledge and feeling of lack of control over one's future creates a lot of anxiety rendering the waiting for an answer strenuous. Norbu clearly states that "the most important difficulty they [asylum seekers] face is time," because: "You have to make your own mental kind of stability so for- to wait for two years is ok. For four years is going to kill me."

Norbu also expresses concern as to the types of questions he may be asked during his second interview (interview on motives). By talking to other asylum seekers he realises that the administration asks some "funny questions". These can concern details like "what time you did this demonstration, and what day is that". Norbu explains that one does not necessarily remember such details, when events happen suddenly or when one doesn't know they will have to recall things:

For some people maybe it's in their mind, for some people it's not in their mind because they do some things where they don't plan it. Sometimes it happens suddenly.

We don't pay that much kind of attention, you know like I said I never thought that I would come to here in Switzerland. I never know.

Moreover attention to such details, such as distances can be different between Tibet and Switzerland as he outlines: "Back in Tibet we really don't pay lots of importance to this distance you know. And this is kind of Swiss style, kind of western style. They just like how much high, how much... something like this." "Funny questions" can also concern things like the price of Coca Cola or of a bag of sugar. In these cases Norbu explains that these are not necessarily facts that he may know as he comes from a remote farming area. His fear with regard to these "funny questions" is that they (the administration) may not believe his story if he is incapable to answer them.

And if I say like, I don't know the price of Coca Cola, I'm a farmer actually I don't know, then maybe they will not believe me that I come from Tibet. [...] Then how much like one kilo of sugar costs, something like that. If you don't go for sugar you never know it. These questions are difficult for me.

2.4 Conclusion

Norbu's story is very clear as to what events and circumstances led to his forced departure from Tibet. His story is hence unmistakably geared at explaining this departure and his consequent asylum application in Switzerland. In doing so he plots his story around two events, both of which involve a voicing of his opinions: the incident at the monastery and his manifestation at the community prayer. Although in both events Norbu takes personal action, he does not control the consequences in either. Knowledge of the Chinese occupation is necessary to understand both the source of his personal action and the outcomes, and indeed Norbu regularly explains or refers to this context in his narrative. The Chinese occupation provides meaning for his actions as he demonstrates a strong identification with the Tibetan cause. The consequences, notably his first arrest, further justify his vocalisation for the Tibetan cause as his expression for freedom leads to further repression.

The plot of Norbu's story clearly reflects a certain knowledge of what constitutes him as a refugee even though he does not demonstrate a distinct knowledge of asylum before reaching Switzerland. He demonstrates clarity about the events and circumstances leading to his departure, its forced character and the impossibility of returning due to the perceived threat. One explanation for this clarity may be that his personal narrative depends on and fits well into broader narratives surrounding the Chinese occupation and the Tibetan cause. It is difficult to identify the specific lines of such broader narratives within a single story. However his repeated references to the Chinese occupation, to the community in exile, his identification with the Tibetan cause all contribute to providing meaning to his personal story. Norbu's narrative is thus a good example of how a personal story fits into and depends on broader narratives.

Despite Norbu's clarity as to what pushed him into exile, he demonstrates a lack of confidence in his application procedure. He does not hold a clear understanding of the procedure which is demonstrated by his uncertainty with regards to the proceedings of his case. Moreover he does not know how the decision is taken and upon what basis or criteria. This lack of transparency as to how the decision-making occurs leads to his perception that the outcome of an application is a matter of luck. His account of different cases concerning Tibetans with varying decisions but similar stories stands as a striking example. This leads to a feeling of insufficient control over how his story is apprehended but a sustained dependency on the administration's decision about his future. This in turn creates a great uncertainty concerning his future and he cannot project himself ahead. He

highlights the stress induced by this uncertainty and identifies the indefinite waiting time for a decision as the biggest difficulty faced by asylum seekers within the procedure.

4. Edy

4.1 Life story

Edy's biographical and life story will not be presented by respect for the protection of his case. Indeed, Edy admitted having made up part the story he told to the Swiss administration. He thus explicitly asked that his full story would not be presented. As his conception of lying is particularly relevant for the discussion, I have chosen to highlight only certain elements of his story leaving out any detail that may lead to his recognition. What I present henceforth is his true story as he told it to me and not to the Swiss administration. The latter is however briefly outlined to understand his positioning with regards to lying.

Edy leaves when the situation in his country is worsening, but just before the outbreak of the war. He leaves by means of a scholarship he receives to go study in a European country. However the main justification for his departure is that he foresaw the situation and thus chose to run away even though he does admit the advantages of the scholarship. There is now a real danger for him to return because of a publication he made just before leaving, thinking it could have an impact on his country's condition. Moreover since his departure, the general situation in his country has considerably worsened and the danger now emanates not only from the regime but from several other sources such as extra-governmental militarized groups and religious fundamentalists.

Edy decides not to apply in the EU country where he received the scholarship but in another European state, although he is conscious of the Dublin agreements. He provides two justifications for this. First is the alienation which he felt in the country of his scholarship. Second is the possibility to bring certain members of his family such as his parents if he is granted the status of refugee in Switzerland. During his audition he thus lies to the administration in order to conceal the fact that he has spent time in another EU state. Lying is a big topic for Edy it will hence be explored in further depth.

4.2 On lying

Edy voices great discomfort with his lie. As soon as he announces that he concealed certain facts to the administration he expresses that he wished he had "been able to say the truth". He presents truth as having a great value for him and highlights that he feels ashamed to keep a lie. He voices well this discomfort when he recalls a conversation with a friend of his who is a translator in the asylum administration in Germany:

I told him about something, by Matthew I think: "what gain, what kind of gain if I gain the whole world and I lose soul?" You know, that, ok, I might be granted asylum, money and whatever I want but I will lose myself if I say lies. I will lose respect of myself you know. It's like self-respect. It's self-esteem. I don't want to lose it.

The response of this friend is to laugh at Edy, and to explain to him:

Edy, I have seen a lot of cases. You know I have been translating. And myself, my members of my family, all of us have got the asylum. It's people, mostly people who don't deserve who got it. And people who need it, mostly they don't get it. Because they tell the truth." He said: "For instance, there has been a prisoner, somebody who had been in prison for three years in country X, Germany didn't grant him the asylum because he had no documents. On the other side I know people, you know, they- because they have contact with somebody in the regime, for instance a, like he could be the person who runs a prison, can give a fake document that this, his relative was in prison, and he will take it to Europe and he will be granted asylum. Even though he has never been in prison. It's like this.

Edy thus defends his lie by demonstrating how an experienced friend convinced him of the necessity to lie. The example provided paints an image of asylum as being somewhat 'the survival of the fittest'. This is an image that Edy sustains later in the interview by arguing that he has a better capacity, and more resources in order to succeed in the asylum application than his relatives. He also argues that his studies help him to know how to identify or construct a plausible lie. As he highlights in the following quote he deems his relatives more deserving than him to claim for protection because they have witnessed and experienced worse events and situations and face imminent danger. He thus feels a sense of responsibility towards them.

So sometimes ... comparing my situation with my parents you know I feel that they, they have more right to be granted asylum. ... But I can do it better you know. I can travel, I know foreign languages. But they don't know. But they, it's like they deserve more than I deserve. I can get scholarships [...] I can find other solutions if not asylum. But they cannot. Ok, it's like my, my parents now, my brothers, they, they deserve, they are in danger. But they can't apply themselves. If now they apply they will not. Even there is no Swiss embassy in X now. In Y [neighbouring country], they will not grant them asylum from Y, ok. So, that's why I'm more convinced now ok, that I have to lie a little, to help them at least. And that's what my friend told me that: "When you tell lie, think of your parents [laughs] and you'll be more convinced. [laughs].

A certain ambiguity emerges from Edy's conception of lying. On the one hand he paints truth as a virtue by emphasising his discomfort in lying and even his fear of 'losing himself'. On the other hand he highlights the necessity of lying in order to protect his family. The image he provides through this ambiguity is that he greatly appraises truth but is somewhat obliged to lie for the sake of protection.

Also interesting in the above quote is Edy's presumption that he does not need asylum himself, but could find other means of selfprotection. Rather, he wants to help his relatives who have lesser means of leaving their country and acquiring adequate protection elsewhere. He thus paints himself as having agency over his life in terms of protecting himself. Indeed, he distances himself from the victimizing notion of protection contained in his conception of asylum. This becomes clear when he voices the humiliation he had to overcome:

I told you like, for me I can find many other solutions. And in the beginning I hated the idea of seeking protection because it's some kind of ...I thought it's some kind of humiliation. It was like "why no I can protect myself, ok, why?" So it's like, it's an admission that you are fragile.

4.3 Conceptions of asylum and the procedure

Before his first asylum application, Edy had a romanticized notion of asylum. He explains that he knew about asylum because his family was communist and aware of the constant danger this ideology represented in their state of origin. Asylum was thus regarded as a final escape. Edy thus attempts to apply for asylum at the Swiss embassy to avoid the military service which he deems against his basic principles. However he receives a negative answer. In the following quotes he demonstrates well how this experience changed his conception of asylum:

So in our minds it's more like, "ok there people to help us." But for people who, who come in contact with these procedures: no. You know that it's not the fact. It's not, there is no people that just want to take you from the hell to put you in the paradise. It's not like this.

But once I get the negative response I started to know that no, there are laws. And there are specific cases in which the asylum can be granted and so on, and so on.

This romanticized idea of asylum, which he admits being a misconception, was probably fostered by the European literature and his notions of history. Indeed in his idealised notion of asylum there are people who understand them because: "500 years ago they suffered from that kind of regimes, ok you know about dictatorships. They no longer have this kind of situations ok, so help people who are like, who need to escape." His first asylum experience hence serves as a lesson in which he is confronted to the reality of these administrative procedures.

4.4 Conclusion

In Edy's case my analysis focuses specifically on the justification for his lie and its relation with his reasons for departure. Edy leaves because he foresees the situation. It is not a forced departure in the sense that he anticipates the danger and does not wait to be in peril to leave. Interestingly he leaves by means of a scholarship but nevertheless highlights that the main reason is the

deterioration of the situation in his country. There is now a real threat of returning because of the open conflict in his state of origin and because of a publication he made before leaving. At the end of his scholarship Edy decides to apply for asylum not in the country of his studies but in Switzerland. The justification he provides is the alienation he experienced during his studies and the possibility of family reunification if he receives a residency permit with the status of refugee. However he lies to the administration about his arrival in Switzerland to dissimulate that he has already lived in a country of the European Union. He is aware that this information would lead to his transfer back to the first country of arrival according to the Dublin agreements.

Particularly relevant in Edy's narrative is his self-representation and the link with his asylum claim. His narrative does justify his asylum application based on the situation in his country of origin and the threat posed by his publication. However he highlights that he does not personally depend on the results of this asylum claim. He has the knowledge and tools to find other means of acquiring a residency status in a safe state of his choice. He thereby demonstrates a strong confidence in his own personal agency over his life. He consequently does not perceive the future as problematic as his opportunities do not depend on the administration's decision. Asylum is for him rather humiliating as it amounts to asking for protection and admitting one's fragility. Edy nevertheless files an asylum application in order to help his family who he does not consider as having the adequate knowledge to succeed themselves.

Edy's conception of the asylum procedure justifies his lie on three different levels. The responsibility he feels towards his relatives is one reason he upholds to justify his lie. Their real, imminent danger acts as a warrant to go against what he considers to be a restrictive and unreasonable legal norm. However his personal justification for lying goes further. The anecdote with his translator friend highlights that he perceives the asylum procedure not as sanctioning truth but rather the capacity of providing proof. However not all individuals having the necessary knowledge and tools to provide proof, truth can become particularly compromising when it is not believed. Hence facing a procedure that cannot protect people who really deserve it, lying appears as a means of justified self-preservation. Finally, Edy no longer sustains an idealized notion of the procedure and the values which uphold it. Asylum is not granted simply based on human rights principles, such as conscientious objection. The administrative procedure rather sets specific rules and criteria that do not encompass the whole diversity of rightful cases. Although he does not say it explicitly, the episode of his first asylum application clearly reflects disenchantment with the values behind asylum. Viewing asylum as a set of legal norms and procedures rather than a tool for protection provides Edy the necessary distance to lie despite his esteem for the truth.

5. Paul

5.1 Biographical data

Paul comes from a wealthy Sunni Muslim family in Syria. When he is in high school he attempts to organise with other students a protest action against the regime, and in particular Hafez Assad, the president at the time. He is arrested and convicted in a military court without access to a lawyer. He spends over a decade in prison. When he is released he finishes his schooling and goes on to study law. However a lot of his civil rights are removed and he is forbidden to practice in court. He works in his family's company and owns some shops. He is married and has two children. Since the beginning of the revolution Paul is arrested and questioned several times. A close relative is held to ransom and returned after payment, but it remains unclear by whom. During the revolution Paul goes to a hospital outside of Syria for medical reasons. When he is away a friend warns him that it is too dangerous for him to return to Syria. Paul travels to Turkey where he is invited to join a Syrian opposition group. He refuses fearing for his family and decides to go seek protection in Switzerland. He travels to Switzerland with the help of smugglers, and presents himself at one of the asylum reception centres upon arrival. His summary audition takes place a couple of days later, and lasts five hours. His second audition (audition on motives) begins a month later and lasts nearly a week.

5.2 Life story

Paul begins his story by telling that he was arrested when he was seventeen and kept in prison for nearly twelve years. He does not provide any clear reason for his arrest in the beginning of the narrative besides mentioning that he was a young man in Syria, dreaming of democracy for the country. He is consequently arrested and judged in a military court without access to a lawyer. We only later learn a little more of the actions and events that led him to prison, although never in great detail. Despite the lack of specification in the introduction of the story, it clearly delineates his incarceration as a political imprisonment in a context of dictatorship (although he does not yet use the term). This has an important effect on Paul's life story: unlike the other narratives, his is not so strongly geared at justifying his asylum application. Indeed, he appears aware that his political imprisonment for close to twelve years constitutes a strong enough persecution to justify his claim. This seems further supported by the fact that he received a second audition (on his motives) after less than a month when the average in Switzerland is close to a year according to the legal case workers. Moreover this audition lasted particularly long (twenty hours). These elements do not as such provide any certainty on the analysis the administration made of his case. However Paul seems relatively confident concerning the outcome of his application. This is revealed in his story which

contains very little elaboration on his motives and rather long narrative accounts of his family and his trip to Europe, as well as elaboration on the dictatorship, its wrongdoings and his own personality.

Although Paul's narrative is not specifically focused on justifying his asylum claim, he does later explain what led to his arrest in more detail. His explanation is focused around two main elements: first his conception of the more general political context, particularly the dictatorship, and second his political questioning and engagement. These two elements are relevant to outline in greater detail as they reveal how he represents himself in the story and how the regime contributes in determining this self.

In Paul's story, it is the political context of dictatorship which frames his actions into a political issue that leads to his imprisonment. He provides a generic definition of a dictator, someone who conceives of himself as holding the ultimate truth, and unwilling to hear criticism or contradiction:

But dictator, every dictator, not Bashar, not Hafez, Hitler, Franco, Castro, Homeini. Everyone had, has, has a one idea in his hand- in his head. He is a god. He is a like a god. Everyone must say yes. No one say no... And now we here.

However, in most of his narrative he does not focus on the dictator alone but on the dictatorship or regime, and uses the pronoun "they". The following quote highlights how the individual must "follow like a sheep" without questioning this regime. It is also a nice illustration of Paul's humour which he uses repeatedly throughout the story to somewhat lighten and ridicule the restrictiveness imposed by the dictatorship.

They released me 1992 they took me, my passport 2008. Why? I don't know. You cannot ask. You must be as a sheep, a sheep, sheep...in the sea- no, no, no, [M: laugh] eat grass, not in the sea [this is meant as a joke].

The dictatorship thus appears as an unpersonified group or apparatus against whom the population stands. Throughout the story he frames the issue as one of opposition between "the people" and "the dictatorship" which he clearly holds responsible for the unrest. This binary antagonism is clear when he recounts his release from prison: "and we take a choice, we must be with our people." Moreover he also attempts to distance himself from the religious and ethnic issues rendering the dictatorship responsible. His generic definition of dictatorship highlights that it is not the identity of the government but the monopoly of power and authority which is problematic. This is illustrated in an anecdote in which his son finds out indirectly that his father faced "a lot of pain in his life". When he asks his parents for explanations, Paul does not want to tell him:

Why? I don't want my son to be angry at anyone. Why? Government is Alawi, my son will hate Alawi. I don't want that. When he grows up I want him to understand that this government is not Alawi, it's a dictatorship.

I'm afraid he will be angry. Anger make a revolution. Make a wrong revolution. I want him understand the fact.

It is in the context of such a dictatorship that Paul recounts his student years. He narrates that they were a group of students with lots of questions and no answers. But the regime rather than providing answers, arrested them when they began to demand change through symbolic actions (such as painting slogans on the school building). Paul thereby draws a picture of the political landscape as one in which there is little or no space to question or take action. Moreover he explains that once he is arrested the 'oppositional' mark becomes metaphorically 'tattooed' upon him, as he is permanently identified by the regime as a member of the opposition. This makes him particularly suspicious and liable to further arrests, which is confirmed in his narrative: "I have here a stamp [shows his arm]: "You are an opposition." In the politic life in Syria we have a.. for example we say always: "If you visit our jail once, you will come again." [he laughs.]"

Paul paints a picture of himself as a political actor. In his youth, he depicts this interest as being contingent on a general atmosphere of questioning and opposition. He makes reference to the general wave of revolutions in the 1980s in the Middle East: "In 1981 these years in East we have a lot of revolution: Iran, Afghanistan, Palestinian..." And to the more Western philosophical influences: "Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Karl Marx...". Being a student at that time also contributed to his political awareness: "We are student and we sit with ourselves and ask ourselves: Why? Why? Why? We haven't answer. But we have question."

Although Paul does not explain what his engagement consists of later on, it is clear from his narrative that political action remains a central element in his life. He goes further by depicting it as part of his character. Indeed, it even becomes a problem when it starts hindering the security of his family. Interestingly he frames this as one of the reasons for seeking asylum in Switzerland. Indeed, safety in his view is not only determined in terms stability but also in terms of a context of 'calm' that does not trigger him into political action:

I have a problem, I want to rest, I want to feel safe. But I cannot make this if I see wrong I must go and try to .. [Interviewer: *make it right.*]. Yes. It's a problem in my life.. And the problem to all my family.

5.3 Conceptions of asylum and the procedure

Paul's education as a lawyer gives him an advantage with regards to his understanding of administrative procedures and the functioning of legal norms. When I ask him whether he knew about asylum seeking before coming to Switzerland, he answers that no he did not have the time to search in the law. However he was clearly aware of asylum seeking in general terms as revealed in his assertion: "I know difficult situation in Switzerland, but I choose it." Here the "difficult situation" refers to Switzerland's arduous asylum application procedure.

The above quote reveals that he does not choose Switzerland on the basis of the application procedure and his chances of acquiring the status of protection but rather on what he terms "outside politics". This includes the neutrality of Switzerland but also the fact that in the other countries he "feels so afraid". He gives the example of France: "If I go to France for example, I don't know, maybe she will give me to my government, I don't know." His choice of Switzerland is also based on the 'type' of Syrians present (although his definition of who constitutes a 'good or a bad type' remains blurry). As has been highlighted this is necessary for him not to become politically engaged.

Paul also recounts an interesting anecdote from one of his auditions. His interviewer asks him whether he can produce a document certifying that he is wanted in Syria. "I tell her: "secret police cannot give you any paper. Why? This is unlawful [...] But she laughed and told me someone gave her this paper and she searched, and she found it's a fake." Paul identifies it as a "trick" question. He solicits from the interviewer why she asks this question when she knows that such an arrest is unlawful hence no official document is provided and that in any case Syria is now "so confused". She wants to know if he would provide a fake document. This anecdote serves as an illustration of the administration's suspicion of asylum seekers' narratives, and their active probing for flaws in the credibility of the stories. Paul identifies this as an 'abnormal' question based on his legal knowledge. However he also explicitly regards this as a 'problem' within the procedure criticizing the leading character of the question. Individuals may think that the lack of such a document hinders the credibility of their story thereby seeking a fake paper as proof even if their story is true. Paul heavily criticizes another aspect of the procedure. When they receive a negative decision from the administration asylum seekers have five days to file an appeal. Paul asserts: "These five days I don't know why. It's wrong. I think it's wrong." He evokes the little free legal help that is available and the impossibility to gather the necessary arguments in five days as the legal help is only available a couple of hours a week. He thus argues that the deadline is "wrong", it does not fulfil basic moral legal standards.

Paul does not mention the time of the procedure and particularly of receiving an answer as an issue in his case. This can be in part explained because of the speed of his first auditions. Indeed

he mentions concerning his second audition on motives that: “thank god I am a lucky man. I see some people [...] stay one year, one year and a half to make the next interview.” Several aspects of the story seem to point towards his confidence that he will get a positive response. He never phrases it as such, but the fact that time does not generate for him a feeling of uncertainty with regards to the future seems to further highlight this confidence. He is rather more concerned with getting his family to Switzerland, but is afraid that they may be “caught” or “stuck” in Istanbul. His concern for his family’s security thus appears as the central focus in Paul’s story.

5.4 Conclusion

Paul’s story does not reflect a concern with justifying his asylum application and his motives. Indeed his political imprisonment for over eleven years stands as a justification alone providing him confidence in his claim. This confidence in his entitlement to receive a refugee status impacts the way his story is framed. Indeed there is little elaboration on his motives as these are self-evident. Rather he elaborates on what a dictatorship is, on his personality and on the importance of his family. These elements together provide the circumstances that lead to his departure, they explain his choice to apply in Switzerland, but they are not presented to prove he is a refugee. Paul presents a generic notion of dictatorship and elaborates on the form it takes in Syria. He distances it from issues related to ethnicity and religion thereby maintaining the issue as being the form of power and governance rather than a cultural conflict. He presents himself as a politically engaged character by nature – not being able to stand by injustice without intervening and dreaming of democracy for his country. In a dictatorship where there is little space for action or questioning, his personality does not bode well as his activism creates trouble for himself and his family. His family being particularly important for him, his departure and choice of Switzerland are motivated by his desire to protect them.

Paul’s confidence in the outcome of his case results in his lack of concern for the future. He rather worries about the possibility to have his family join him considering the situation in Syria. Despite his confidence he does criticize the administrative procedure in place in Switzerland. His anecdote of the “trick” question he is asked during the audition reflects his judgment concerning the means employed by the administration to check the truthfulness of narratives. Moreover, he also criticizes the short deadline to file an appeal, denouncing it as “wrong”. Through these two examples Paul dispraises the procedure as having iniquitous aspects.

CHAPTER IV PART 2: PERSPECTIVES OF LEGAL CASE WORKERS

At the moment of my interviews, asylum seekers were not provided legal help during the asylum application. Several non-governmental organizations, often with religious affiliations, offer free legal aid for asylum seekers. The legal case workers are usually jurists but one can also find other professions such as social anthropologists who have a good knowledge of asylum's legal framework in Switzerland. I carried an interview with two legal case workers from two different organizations. Both had a strong experience in the domain as they had each been working well over a decade in the field. Their perception of their work and their role in the procedure was very similar. Differences occurred mainly with regards to focalization on certain aspects of their work and in the way they framed specific issues. However due to the strong similarities, it was easy to identify common topics and how these are discussed and handled by the legal case workers. This enabled to draw a picture of the role they may play for asylum seekers' story telling within the context of the procedure.

1. Role conception

According to Maude her role as a legal case worker is first to inform and advise as the procedure is complicated and usually in a foreign language that asylum seekers don't understand. She thus presents her initial role as providing the necessary information for asylum seekers in order for them to understand what is going on and be able to take an "active role in the elaboration of their case". Moreover she explains that she is there to "verbalize" what they have to say, but that they remain the "raw material". She is the "scribe" of their story, but they remain responsible of what they tell. Adrienne also mentions that her role is to "explain how it goes [the application procedure]". However she focuses more on the need to "reassure", "encourage" and "inspire trust" so that they tell what they have to tell.

The difference in how Maude and Adrienne present their role provides a slightly different image of the needs of the asylum seeker. In Maude's exposition the asylum seekers needs help to understand the procedure and thus take action. In Adrienne's drawing the applicant needs to be reassured in order to open up and expose her story. Adrienne thus focuses more on the work of drawing the story forth and the vulnerability of the asylum seeker in that regard. Whereas Maude highlights their appropriation of responsibilities in terms of 'taking an active role', for example in collecting proof. As we shall see however, these differences between the two legal case workers' portrayal of asylum seekers is minimized throughout their interviews. Adrienne also highlights the responsibility of asylum seekers and Maude equally delves into issues of vulnerability and the need to reassure and create 'safe spaces' for narration. Although one focuses more on the legal and technical elements and the other on the interactional aspects, their conception of the work remains

similar. Furthermore two facets of their work that they both greatly emphasize are the legal framework and the principle of reality.

1.1 Legal framework

The legal framework determines the practical lines of Adrienne and Maude's work. As Adrienne phrases it, they need to work with "what is defined in the asylum law in order to claim access to a residency permit". Maude specifies that this consists of the motives of persecution: "the elements of the story that determine whether it is a persecution or not." However the presence alone of motives of persecution is not sufficient, these motives and the story more generally have to have "an appearance of truthfulness" (*vraisemblable*). This truthfulness is ideally established by means of material proofs. These are documents that can relate to the "knot" of the story by confirming the threat of persecution (such as a warrant of arrest or an act of condemnation). However when the persecution itself cannot be materially proven, truthfulness of the story can be upheld by means of documents that constitute indirect proof, that is documents that confirm peripheral elements in the narrative. Maude provides an explicit example. In an asylum claim by a woman based on the motive of persecution in forced marriage, she may for example provide a wedding act signed by the imam that confirms that there are sixty years of difference between the spouses.

Such an act is a sign that the story has some grounds. It does not prove that she was mistreated by her husband but it certainly proves that it is not a consented marriage.

However, as Maude complains, material proofs are increasingly hard to access, hence the truthfulness of the story depends on the "body of concordant indicia" (*'faisceau d'indices'*). This consists of a number of elements in the story that together as a whole combine to create a coherent body of evidence thereby proving the story upon some standard of proof. These include in Maude's non-exhaustive list: the external plausibility (whether the story fits what we know of the country of origin and its situation), and the personal credibility and coherence of the story, particularly the lack of contradictions. Adrienne also highlights that the credibility of the story can be upheld by other means than the material proof. She does not use the notion of "concordant indicia" but also lists elements of narration such as detail, clarity and structure:

What is important is that the person, that the asylum seeker renders his narrative 'truthful', credible. Well there sometimes the person just the way he narrates is very detailed, very clear, very structured. So there you go, credible. Sometimes the person cannot be, then a document can be a proof.

1.2 The reality principle

The legal framework implies that there are important constraints to what legal case workers can do to help the asylum seekers, and that there is a high level of uncertainty as to the outcome of their aid. Both Maude and Adrienne thus strongly highlight the importance in their work of what Maude terms the “reality principle”. As she explains this involves “not to promise anything” and to remain “very realistic” with the asylum seekers. She argues that it is not only a “form of respect” but in some sorts an “ethical rule” in the work of legal aid in order not to mislead the claimant. Although Adrienne does not use the term “reality principle” she clearly adheres to the notion as exemplified in the following quote:

I promise to help them, to do the best but I don't promise a result, I don't promise. I tell them: “I don't have a magic wand, I mean.” I have to do within the legal framework, with arguments and with motives.

Adrienne also depicts this as an ethical or moral issue as she finds that “giving false hopes is really terrible”, and “she does not want to leave them in an anxiety”.

2. Drawing the story forth

One of the main tasks of the legal case workers is to get acquainted with the asylum seekers' stories and particularly with what they call the “knot” of the issue, the elements that constitute the motive of persecution. If the asylum seeker has already initiated the application process, the legal case worker may have access to audition notes that enable to quickly identify the main lines of the story. However, a large part of the work is done through face to face verbal interaction in order to draw a complete picture of the individual's narrative. This section will elaborate on various aspects of the social interactions between the legal case workers and asylum seekers which are necessary to bring the story forth.

2.1 Inspiring trust

In order to draw the story of asylum seekers forth it is necessary to inspire trust (*'mettre en confiance'*). Indeed it requires them to reveal often difficult and intimate events that are sometimes painful to remember. Moreover, they are conscious that within the administrative procedure their story is the basis on which a decision is taken. Hence what they say can have a determining effect on their future. This sometimes creates a lot of stress and anxiety. As Maude highlights:

When we ask them questions certain need some time to be sure that what they say there is not evaluated as it would be by a civil servant responsible for studying the asylum request. So we have to clarify our role immediately.

One of the first steps when meeting a new asylum seeker is thus to break down the wall of suspicion by insisting on the independence of the legal case workers from the administration and on the notion of “professional confidentiality”. Adrienne outlines that this work of reassurance does not have a specific methodology but requires a certain “feeling” and “experience”. What she calls the “human factor” plays an important role in this domain as it is deeply involved in social interaction. Moreover, both legal case workers insist that the setting in which the asylum seekers are received is important. For example this should be an individual, private space preferably without the presence of children as this renders them more available to speak.

Both Maude and Adrienne maintain that providing a safe space of trust requires not only the adequate space and reassurance, but also enough time. Maude highlights a type of example in which time is necessary to “break the silence” and which typically (but not only) concerns cases of sexual violence. She explains that these types of narratives often contain silences, circumventions or convoluted responses. These provide clues for the legal case worker not to ask open, direct questions. Rather: “we approach, we advance gently, we never force expression.” This establishes the security and trust necessary for them to express their “actual story”. Adrienne also clearly suggests that time is sometimes necessary for an individual to simply tell the truth. In those cases one first needs to identify the contradictions in the story in order to then establish the necessary trust to bring forth the authentic story. She clearly states that “the more speaking time the better.”

Adrienne also mentions a different type of situation in which time is necessary to comprehend the story. Her example concerns individuals with psychological issues with whom it becomes “super difficult to see clearly”. But by repeatedly hearing them, some things become recurrent and one can start seeing a “skeleton”. Hence time is not only necessary to bring forth the narratives but also sometimes to make sense of them. This is particularly relevant in the face of the diversity of ways of telling which will further be outlined.

2.2 Going to the point

Time however is scarce. The legal case workers are constrained by the lack of resources available in face of the number of demands, and by the procedural deadlines fixed by the legal and administrative criteria. They are therefore obliged to ‘get to the point’ quickly. Maude concedes that this can be quite “brutal” as focusing on the knot of the story often means going into the intimate space of the person. However both emphasise that it is necessary to focus on the essential aspects of a story quickly. This somehow stands in contradiction with the amount of time necessary to establish an adequate level of trust. Hence the legal case workers find themselves juggling in order to strike a balance between time and trust, the former needing to be limited and the latter expanded.

2.3 Ways of narrating

Legal case workers are confronted with a wide variety of asylum seekers, from different origins and social backgrounds. This has an important incidence on the manners of narration, and hence on the ways of dealing with the stories. Adrienne in particular outlines a number of elements that can account for differences. There is what she terms the “cultural question” which can sometimes generate “imprecisions”. For example diverging notions of the family and who constitutes it can create confusions when varying numbers are mentioned across different accounts of the story. Even more so than the origin, Adrienne highlights the importance of the educational background of the person and how this can influence the process of narration. In the following quote, Adrienne outlines differences that can occur between individuals’ narrative presentations:

And we see the difficulty for certain people to narrate, not only because they have more difficulty to be structured in the way of speaking, but also in the way of remembering things. It’s really very different.

Adrienne expands on the notion of memory and its impact on narration by highlighting the difficulty of remembering. Indeed in the procedure asylum seekers are sometimes requested to remember certain things with great detail, such as locations or time of the events. She explains that for the asylum seekers it is often not the details that are important, but the fact that the event itself happened. It can therefore be very frustrating for them when the administration nit-picks on details that they don’t consider relevant. Adrienne also highlights her admiration for the asylum seekers who tell painful things of the past that have happened some time ago. Memory operates selectively sometimes obscuring painful details:

But the way of telling things is very, very important, but very difficult. Not only to remember things that are striking in the past because we also want to somewhat forget what has been revolving around. It’s clear that the fact, the striking element remains, but what has been around well...I think it’s quite human. It’s also a way to protect oneself a little bit.

There are also personal differences that impact the way of narrating. Adrienne mentions the aspect of perception, arguing that two people witnessing the same event will always provide a different account, including different details or aspects of the circumstances. Maude highlights the divergence in individuals’ emotional responses to events. She notes that individual reactions to similar traumatic experiences can be “extremely differentiated”. There is a panel of reactions from laughter to paralysis. She thus explains that the non-verbal expressions of the person she is talking to does not always talk for itself.

2.4 Avoiding incitement

Both Adrienne and Maude insist that they want to avoid influencing the asylum seekers' story. However they diverge slightly in the focus of their argument. Maude is particularly concerned "not to be accused of inciting the asylum seeker to bring up elements that are not his own." She thus places her concern along legal lines. Adrienne on the other hand is concerned not to instrumentalise the asylum seekers:

I don't want to instrumentalise them. Yeah, I don't want to tell them: "there, you have to tell a version that fits in there." I don't want to distort their story. It's their story, it belongs to them. Yeah...he won't go tell a story so that it fits in the criteria.

Interestingly in this quote, Adrienne renders the issue an ethical one by emphasising that the story "belongs" to them, and hence should not be "distorted" to fit the legal criteria. This argument seems to reveal her awareness of the self-identification value of a story and hence her concern not to retrieve this from the asylum seekers by adjusting it to fit the criteria. Moreover, her use of the notion of instrumentalisation suggests that the legal case workers may also have a stake in a case's success. However, as we understand in other parts of her interview, she places a lot of value on truth simply because the "real version" is more likely to be coherent and not generate contradictions. Hence she argues that instead of making the story "fit" with the danger of "modifying" it she rather encourages the asylum seekers to go into more depth. In order to avoid the danger of inciting false elements in the story she also does not explain the notion of persecution or of refugee to the asylum seekers. Maude also encourages the asylum seekers to go into more depth, by telling them to develop when they are asked a question. She provides a particularly striking case example:

A very recent example of a young person who in his first audition said: "I left home because there was war." Well, yes certainly, and this young man came to me before his second audition. And I told him: "Well ok, at home there's war, but how is it war in your home?" "Yes but you know." I tell him: "But start from the assumption that I don't know. What is war in your country?" So he started to tell me what he lived himself. And what he had lived. And he was telling me: "but that's how it is in my home." I tell him: "Yes, but it's just not the same thing if you just say that you left because there's war at home or I left because there's war and for me this is what happened." That's what I explain them. That they have to talk about themselves, that they shouldn't hesitate to say how they felt, so there. That's what it is for me to prepare for an audition.

3. Apprehending the story

As the legal case workers' time and resources are limited, they select the cases they will follow, refusing cases they deem not liable to succeed. To establish this selection they also have to make a

certain evaluation of the story. When asked how the administration evaluates the narratives they both answer that they don't know. Indeed, only the negative decisions are sent with arguments, so the legal case workers have relatively few clues to establish a picture of the criteria of assessment. Maude explains that "the authorities have such a discretionary power" that the legal case workers' notions of the criteria remain very theoretical. Both Adrienne and Maude thus distance their assessment of the stories from that of the administration. However as is apparent through both interviews their assessment remains along the lines of the legal frame and their conception of the criteria as that is what determines whether a case may be successful. Indeed, as their aim is for their clients to succeed they focus their attention on judicial reasoning and the legal framework.

When discussing how they apprehend asylum seekers' narrative, both legal case workers highlighted the role of experience and Adrienne further outlined what she terms the "human factor". Maude explains that experience helps to apprehend the credibility of the narrative. As she has worked in the field for over twenty years she has acquired knowledge, notably concerning the situations in a lot of countries and experience in interpersonal relations. Adrienne goes a step further by arguing that experience provides a certain intuition and feeling when assessing the truthfulness of stories. Moreover she mentions the "human factor" which she explains as being:

How the person is, how she talks, how she can narrate, how she can tell what really happened. How one may also touch the person one is talking to, I mean, certain people touch us more than others. I mean that's why I say this "human factor".

Here Adrienne refers to demeanour, how the person behaves, or what she seems to others. Interestingly she suggests that it can also be a drawback. Indeed she highlights that "being touched more by some people than others" can cause a problem of equity for the administration. Here she hints that despite there being legal criteria to follow, human subjective judgement still comes into play. Maude also warns against demeanour when she explains that the non-verbal language of her respondent does not always speak for itself.

4. Conclusion

Both Adrienne and Maude thus highlight that in practical terms their work consists in helping the asylum seekers highlight the credibility of their story. They do so by helping the asylum seeker to tell their "full" and "real" story and to collect documents that confirm elements of the narrative. Both explain that if they deem the story not liable to succeed, they do not take the case in charge. In order to make the decision to take a case or not, they make an assessment of the individuals' narrative. As success is determined along the lines of the legal framework, this assessment is also made in terms

of presence of motives and credibility, similarly as an auditioner. Where they distinguish and distance themselves from the auditioner or the administrative assessment, is that they provide a broader space for flexibility in terms of truth.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

“We cannot assume a priori that flight and exile as such provide the important turning-points of ‘before’ and ‘after’” (Marita Eastmond, 1996, p. 246). Indeed, we cannot assume that an individual necessarily defines oneself around his or her displacement. Moreover, as aptly discussed by Malkki (1995) the displacement asylum seekers undergo does not necessarily lead to a loss of meaning and identity. Rather narratives reveal that individuals are perfectly capable of integrating new situations and experiences into a coherent whole. However, asking a person to recount his or her life story as an asylum seeker is already directing the person’s narrative around displacement. ‘Asylum seeker’ is an administrative category which describes the status of a person as being in the process of filing an application to be recognised as a refugee. The procedure requires to provide a convincing story which reveals the individual’s motives for applying – why they left their country of origin and are seeking protection. It is therefore unsurprising that all the asylum seekers I interviewed provided a story which recounts what led to their departure. Stories thereby provide a journey into the individual’s personal view of his life, of the world, but also of him/herself – what meaning he or she attributes to his or her existence and what role their migration plays in their life trajectory.

Considering that a narrative is by definition unique it is difficult to draw generalizable conclusions as to how individuals engage in the process of narrating their life. However comparing the stories on similar lines, such as purpose, plot, themes and self-representation, observations can be made concerning the way in which meaning is constructed within the narratives. The first section of this chapter engages in such a transversal comparison. By referring back to the theoretical framework and the empirical literature, these observations lead to further reflections particularly concerning the way in which ‘being an asylum seeker’ may shape the stories of the individuals concerned. Ochs and Capps rightly note that “in forging story elements into a plot, narrators build a theory of events” thereby identifying “life problems, how and why they emerge, and their impact on the future” (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 27). It is such “life problems”, particularly with regards to the procedure, that the second part of this chapter aims at outlining. The issues take the form of observations and reflections based on problems identified by the asylum seekers, by the legal case workers and in the literature.

1. Transversal comparison

1.1 Plot

Although each story is constructed to provide an explanation for departure notable differences can be observed in the way they are structured to fulfil this. Focusing on the direct causes for departure, Norbu and Alex both provide specific events involving individual dissent and consequent arrests which generate a fear for their person. In Norbu's case it is motivated by the fear of the Chinese authorities' possible reprisal particularly considering his previous arrest. He makes the causal relation explicitly between the episode at the prayer session and his departure, even though he does not personally take the decision to leave. In Alex's case the causal relation is not explicitly stated. However the way in which he orders events in the narrative paints his departure as directly following from his arrest and torture by the Ethiopian authorities. Edy and Paul don't identify specific events as the direct cause for departure. They rather recount a deterioration of the situation in their country of origin, particularly threatening considering their political affiliation and engagement. The threat is especially poignant in Paul's case bearing in mind his previous arrest for over a decade and his consequent branding as a member of the opposition. Edy's concern delves rather from his depiction of himself as an oppositional character. The threat becomes concrete once his publication is censured and the situation further deteriorates after his departure.

All four stories outlined above depict in one way or another the personal character of the threat they face. Umit however highlights his life trajectory and general socio-political situation as pushing him to depart. His narrative considerably differs from the others with regards to the principle motive for departure: it cannot be temporally situated as directly antecedent to his departure. Rather the situation which pushes him to depart – the impasse and insecurity – results from his life trajectory and the general social and economic situation in his region. He does not identify his motives to be situated in any specific personal experience of persecution but rather a diffused feeling of oppression and insecurity. Nor did he engage in any specific political act but feels a general lack of freedom and a considerable threat if he would broach it. The turning point in his story – the robbery of his phone and consequent search by the police – does not play a relevant role in constituting his motivations for departure but merely triggers it. During his first interview, it is the absence of events or actions that transforms the general fear into a threat directed at his person specifically which is problematic. He becomes aware that he does not have a "personal case". Interestingly, there are aspects in his story such as his non-religiosity which could be framed and argued to present a concrete personal threat. However this would not correspond to the way in which he conceives of the protection provided by the asylum framework and legislation. Rather than

focusing on specific personal experiences he lists all of the issues which he deems relevant in relation to his conception of asylum providing more thematic lines than in the other narratives included in the research. He thereby frames a concrete fear through the assembly of all the different sources of insecurity.

1.2 Themes

In terms of the themes that compose the narratives they can be grouped into two: those that relate to the socio-political context and those that concern belonging – groups, communities or movements the individuals identify with. Often, the general context and the individual's identifications are inseparable in providing explanation for events and actions in their stories. These two thematic clusters will henceforth be presented to demonstrate how each of the participants situated themselves and their narrative accordingly.

All the asylum seekers interviewed provided a more or less extensive elaboration of the political and social context in their country or region of origin. All focused on the oppression and lack of freedom stemming from the political context. Norbu talks of the Chinese occupation and the lack of freedom, particularly religious freedom, which ensues. It is against this lack of freedom that he finds the courage to voice dissent. Alex similarly talks of the oppression of the regime which he identifies as being mainly Amhara. The way he depicts the regime is close to an image of annexation of a territory by another ethnic group. This is revealed particularly in his nationalist language. Both Norbu and Alex strongly identify themselves with their ethnic group, and it is this identification which sets them against the political context. Alex's narrative (before his asylum claim in Europe) can be depicted as mainly aimed at explaining his fight for Oromo freedom. His activism appears in his narrative as one of the principle sources of meaning in his life. Norbu also strongly identifies with what he terms the "Tibetan cause". Although voicing his opinions is what leads to his precipitated departure he does not, like Alex, personally identify as a protester or political objector. Meaning in his story is rather derived from the chain of events in which his actions, situated within the political context of Tibet, result in a threatening situation.

Edy and Paul depict the political situation in a relatively similar way. Both come from a state governed by a dictatorship and both leave as the situation is considerably worsening. Although both come from a society that is relatively ethnically divided, they distance themselves from this and focus rather on their opposition to the dictatorship in terms of values. Indeed both place a strong meaning on what they identify as democratic and human values. Both mention their involvement in political opposition groups even though neither detail what actions these involved. What they both emphasise is rather the necessity to act against a political system which denies their freedom and

sows seeds of hatred. There is a notable distinction in the way they frame the lack of freedom. Edy focuses specifically on his personal experience of lack of freedom and how he deals with it psychologically. Paul focuses rather on the lack of freedom within the society as a whole pitting the dictatorship against what he terms “the people”. Paul nonetheless has a strong concrete experience of lack of freedom considering his decade long arrest. He is aware that he is branded as a member of the opposition by the regime because of this arrest. Hence his self-identification as belonging to the opposition is reinforced by the external identification of the regime. Nevertheless he only leaves when the risk is really too great, unintentionally leaving his family behind (a situation which delves from the circumstances of his departure).

Umit’s depiction of the general context and how it relates to his self-identification is broader than the others and also includes a social aspect. This broadness is notably reflected in his story as there are more contextual themes which are relevant for the meaning of his departure: the issues with the administrative statuses, the insecurity in Afghanistan, Hazara discrimination, the lack of religious freedom, the lack of opportunities. The source of discrimination is not specifically political but rather stems from several sources. For example he depicts the insecurity in Afghanistan as resulting from criminality and from the violence perpetrated by the Talibans. His belonging to the Hazara ethnic group, which can be externally identified through his physical features, further exacerbates this insecurity as he identifies it as a pretext for discrimination by others. Being non-religious in a strongly religious society is another source of constraint, as living against the religious precepts would pose a threat. Through these diffused sources of discrimination and oppression Umit depicts his issues as being socially embedded. The broadness of themes can partly be explained by his understanding of the Geneva Convention’s definition of refugee and how his situation relates to it. Indeed, he depicts the understanding of his plight as a process in which this definition plays an important role. Hence his interpretation of the definition provides meaning to his story and thereby plays a structuring role in his narrative. This observation can be linked to Bruner’s theoretical proposition that the very form of the narrative shapes the experience itself (1991). As Umit’s understanding of the refugee definition provides an important source of meaning within his narrative, we may suggest that this definition largely shapes his experience of displacement.

1.3 Aim of the story

When apprehending the aim of the story – what the narrator is trying to achieve through the telling of his story – close attention to the context is essential. This has already been partly discussed in the methodology. As a reminder, the interview situation and my questions – particularly the opening question which asks to recount a narrative of asylum – play a significant role in shaping the purpose

of the story. Most of the narrators focus on recounting and explaining what led to their departure. However when the individuals become aware that the evaluation criteria of the administrative framework conflict with their story, the narrative becomes focused on justification. This is particularly apparent in Alex, Edy and Umit's stories. Alex begins with recounting his trips through Europe. He is conscious that his application in Switzerland goes against European legislation (specifically with regards to readmission agreements) and thus starts the interview by justifying why he has done so, drawing mainly from his health issues. Edy also goes against the rules set by the Dublin agreement. Like Alex, it is not his whole narrative which is directed at justification but only where his story conflicts with the administrative principles. In Umit's case however it is the meaning he assigns to his departure which conflicts with the legal criteria of refugeehood. His whole narrative thus takes the form of a justification of his asylum claim. This does not occur initially but when he recounts his experience of his first interview and becomes aware that he does not have a "personal case".

What happens to the narrative when it turns into a justification? One observable shift is an increase of argumentative language as the individual exposes opinions and worldviews rather than focusing on narration. This large use of argumentative language is particularly apparent in Umit's narrative as he enters into a discussion on the lack of fairness within the procedure. In the cases that engage in justification the individual becomes focused on convincing the listener rather than representing oneself and experiences. This observation can be linked to Eastmond's conclusion that "the purpose given to the telling of one's story also defines the focus of what is remembered and told" (1996, p. 236). In the narratives apprehended within this research, individuals' identification of a need to justify an aspect of his or her experience results in a shift in what is told from a report of events to an exposition of opinions.

It is interesting to note that the asylum seekers engage in justification despite my independence from the administration. This demonstrates that they are aware that their story does not fit the asylum legislative framework in certain respects even though they consider themselves as personally justified in claiming asylum. They thus distance themselves from the asylum procedure and legislation emphasising their own meaning. This distancing or criticism from the asylum procedure is observable not only in the three narratives that involve justification but in all of the cases. Indeed as will be highlighted further in depth Paul and Norbu also criticise certain aspects of the procedure notably with regards to its apprehension of truth and demands for proof. This distancing from the procedure enables the asylum seekers to highlight the importance and relevance of their own modes of meaning-making rather than that of the asylum framework.

1.4 Self-conception and agency

Self-presentation in terms of agency provides important indications concerning the individuals' conception of his or her capacities for action and how these may be variously restricted. As has been already highlighted in all of the stories the narrators interviewed identify a lack of freedom in their context of origin. It is thus interesting to compare how each situates himself with regards to this constraint. In four of the stories (Alex, Norbu, Paul and Edy) the lack of freedom is identified as emanating from the regime or government in power, and interestingly all four stories reflect an active dissent towards the imposed limitations. It is this opposition that provides meaning to departure. They differ however with regards to the way taking of action is presented, how it relates to their self-conception and what role it plays in the story. For Alex fighting for Oromo freedom takes on a strong signification with regards to his self-identification. As presented in the analysis of his case, his narrative before departure is largely geared at explaining this activism. His fight does not only provide meaning for his story of departure but also appears as providing purpose in his life. Norbu's dissent takes on a relatively different role in his story. Indeed he does not present himself as being a political opponent, nor having a particularly rebellious personality. He depicts his voicing of opinion as moments in which his fear turns into courage. In these moments he does not advocate fighting against the Chinese occupation but rather taking agency to live one's religion fully and openly. Although Norbu identifies with the Tibetan cause, his acts of dissent remain on the level of narrative explanation rather than self-conception.

Paul and Edy both highlight their opposition as a characteristic of their personality. In Paul's case this serves as an explanation for his departure. He becomes aware of the threat his oppositional character may place on his family and therefore departs and chooses Switzerland which he considers to be calmer in order to protect them. Edy frames his departure differently. He decides to leave as he becomes aware of the deterioration of the situation in his country. His departure is rather a means to maintain his agency as the situation of chaos in which the state is sinking would increase the constraints already stemming from the dictatorship. Indeed, throughout his story Edy places a great value on his personal agency. This agency notably takes the form of knowledge and intellectual tools which he conceives as providing him the means to maintain control over his life, more so for example than other members of his family. His agency thus plays an important role for his self-conception.

Umit's conception of agency cannot be connected to dissent like the other stories as he does not focus his narrative around any clear acts of opposition. His narrative is rather focused on depicting the lack of agency as stemming from his situation of impasse. Although he takes the decision to leave the insecurity and lack of freedom in his region, this departure appears as forced considering the lack of possible other solutions. This indirectly reveals that he projects his migration

as being a means to bring him more space for agency – to be able to live more freely his agnosticism, away from discrimination and oppression due to his ethnic belonging and free from threats of criminality. He interprets the notion of protection contained within the refugee definition he comes across as providing this space for more agency. Hence the way he understands the definition not only provides a means of understanding his present, but also of projecting himself into the future.

2. The asylum framework in the story

Having outlined the narratives along the lines of plot, themes, aim and self-conception, the presence and shaping of the asylum framework within the stories can now be examined. There are three main thematic lines which emerge from the interviews both with the asylum seekers and legal caseworkers and which largely converge with the literature. First, the tendency within the asylum procedure to focus particularly on the victimization is discussed as it is particularly relevant to understand Alex's shift of narrative before and after his arrival in Europe. Second, three aspects relating to the perception of the outcome of the procedure are outlined. These include the role of knowledge of the procedure, the asylum seekers' narrative competence, and the issues relating to the lack of possibility for a projection in the future stemming from the uncertainty of the outcome. Third, questions regarding the apprehension of truth are discussed including the hermeneutical alertness and endemic suspicion, and broader considerations concerning the apprehension of truth by the administration.

2.1 Victimization

Jeffers observes that facing the need to provide compelling narratives of persecution asylum seekers often find themselves obliged to perform the role of victim in order to render their case convincing (Jeffers, 2008). On his side Marlowe has also noted a tendency to conceive of the refugee experience as trauma-focused (Marlowe, 2010). This is further accentuated when one considers the shift from political to humanitarian conceptions of asylum (Fassin & d'Halluin, 2005). However as has already been noted, individuals do not necessarily frame themselves as passive victims within their narratives. Moreover focusing on trauma may represent an impediment to reconstructing a dignified sense of self (Shuman & Bohmer, 2004). With regards to these observations, Alex provides an interesting example as he demonstrates a striking shift in his narrative from a self-conception as an active agent to a focus on his physical injuries.

The analysis of Alex's narrative before his departure underlines the predominant role of his political engagement for his self-conception and meaning in the story. In his second narrative however he focuses on his poor health condition and his need of medical aid thereby presenting an image of himself as physically broken and requiring help and protection. One explanation for this

shift between the two narratives is Alex's need to justify moving through Europe and applying for asylum in Switzerland in light of the readmission agreements. Although he does not explicitly talk of the role of his legal case worker, it is relevant to note here that Alex is the only asylum seeker amongst my interviewees who received legal support. Alex's medical condition is one of the sole motives which can be advanced to justify his application in Switzerland and convince the state to consider his case. Indeed according to art. 83 al. 4 of the Federal act on foreign nationals (FNA, 2005, CC 142.20) if he can demonstrate that his medical condition renders his return to Italy unreasonable, Switzerland may take responsibility for his case. As the legal case workers interviewed have both strongly emphasised they are constrained to work with the legal framework, and in Alex's case this means focusing on his medical condition to defend his case. His physical injuries thereby become the "primary social currency" to uphold his claim (Marlowe, 2010, p. 190).

Interesting in Alex's case is to note the relation between his shift to a narrative of protection and how he frames his experience of asylum in Europe and Switzerland. As has been already highlighted, Alex asserts that his life as an asylum seeker is meaningless. Indeed the sources of meaning for his personal self-conception such as his struggle for Oromo freedom and becoming a doctor are not only no longer possible but also irrelevant in defending his case. He thus lacks an appropriate space to represent himself beyond his physical weakness. This focus on his physical injuries demanded by the asylum framework is detrimental for his sense of self as he loses purpose and agency in his narrative. Moreover he faces insufficient possibilities to engage in meaningful activities imposed notably by the asylum status including for example work restrictions (art. 43, AsyIA). As a result he lacks resources to create new meaning and purpose in his present.

Looking at the other stories they reveal that it is necessary to distinguish between two levels of victimization. On the one hand individuals may engage in the victimization of their community of identification. For example Alex and Norbu both highlight how their group of belonging, Oromo and Tibetan respectively, is subjected to oppression by the government in power. On the other hand individuals' narrative may involve a victimization of the self. However the victimization of the community of belonging does not necessarily result in a victimization of the self. Rather the asylum seekers interviewed demonstrate how they take action to change the situation. Even Paul, who was imprisoned for over a decade, does not focus on his powerlessness but rather on elements in his story that reveal his agency. Only Umit through his narrative of impasse draws himself as being in a situation of helplessness. However he takes agency to leave this situation thereby also demonstrating his power of action.

2.2 Perception of the Outcome

One of the most striking observations when comparing the various stories is the differences in the levels of uncertainty regarding the outcome of the asylum seekers application. On the one hand Alex, Umit and Norbu express big uncertainties with regards to the administrative decision concerning their case causing variable levels of distress. On the other hand Edy and Paul demonstrate less concern and even some confidence about the outcome, even though a certain level of uncertainty does of course remain. When attempting to understand why these differences occur one may draw a parallel with the role of knowledge and narrative competence which will each be explored respectively in the first and second part of this section. Another aspect which is relevant to highlight is the consequences of this uncertainty for the individual's self-conception, more specifically the lack of future projection which will be discussed in a third part.

2.2.1 Role of knowledge

The asylum seekers interviewed demonstrated various level of knowledge concerning the procedure and this seems to have an incidence on their confidence with regards to the outcome of their case. Interestingly, although there are actual differences of information it is rather the perception of their knowledge which seems to be relevant. Alex and Norbu do not seem to have had a clear knowledge of the procedure before their arrival in Europe or in Switzerland. This lack of knowledge is still present during the procedure, when I interviewed them, as both expressed their uncertainty about the outcome and their lack of understanding concerning the way in which the decision making is carried out by the authorities. Nonetheless Alex has received some further information as he benefits from the support of a legal case worker. Umit comes across the definition of refugee before his departure which largely informs his narrative. However during the first audition he becomes aware of his lack of knowledge and strongly deplors it as, according to him, it prevents him from "making a case". On their side, Edy and Paul both perceive that they have more knowledge concerning the workings of the procedure. For Paul this perception results from his legal studies which provide him a certain understanding of administrative proceedings and legal decision-making. This expertise notably comes up when he confronts the auditioner on the suitability of her trick question. In Paul's case however his confidence also seems to derive from his knowledge that his political imprisonment for eleven years provides a strong element in his claim. Edy acquires knowledge of the procedure when he applies a first time through the Swiss embassy several years before his arrival in Switzerland. The failure of this first application makes him aware that there are clear criteria concerning who may qualify for the status of refugee and thereby dismantles his romanticised notion

of asylum. Moreover, Edy also acquires knowledge through an acquaintance who works as a translator.

Comparing the different stories it can be observed that there are different sources of knowledge, which may affect its viability but not necessarily the individuals' confidence. Knowledge can be acquired for example through a network such as other asylum seekers or smugglers; it can come from legal case workers, or previous experiences with asylum or as in Umit's case from the internet. Knowledge can provide the asylum seekers with confidence concerning the grounds of their claim before entering the procedure. However once in the midst of it, they are confronted with a varying degree of uncertainty with regards to how their case will be evaluated. This uncertainty can be identified as a lack of transparency within the process of decision making. However it is relatively unavoidable considering the subjective character of the decision making process, as highlighted by Macklin (1998).

Legal case workers are also confronted to uncertainty as to the outcome of the asylum seekers' cases they support. Indeed they both highlight that they cannot know beforehand how the administration will rule. Nonetheless they have a deep understanding and experience of the workings of the procedure. They conceive of their role as explaining to the asylum seekers how the procedure works and how it will look like for them. However they do not provide them with the definition of refugee and the criteria for determining persecution as they fear being accused of inciting the asylum seekers to bring up elements that are not their own. The logic behind this restraint is that knowledge of the refugee determination procedure and criteria may incite asylum seekers to bring in facts that are not theirs. Moreover Adrienne argues that the real version is more likely to be coherent. Rather than providing the criteria for determining persecution, the legal caseworkers focus on encouraging the asylum seekers to develop, provide more details, and indications on how they personally experienced situations. Moreover, in face of the lack of transparency and the uncertainty that goes with it, they employ the reality principle, confronting the asylum seekers with the reality of this very uncertainty.

2.2.2 Narrative competence

Another element contributing to the individuals' confidence concerning their case is their perception of their narrative competence in the context of the procedure. As a reminder narrative competence refers to the individual's capacity to frame his or her story employing the linguistic resources and modes of reference of his or her interlocutor. The narrative competence of a person relates to their cultural toolkit that is their language, their norms, expectations, ideas about what is moral, rational, appropriate, and aesthetic (Ochs & Capps, 1996). In the context of asylum the narrative competence

of individuals include not only their communicative resources but also aspects such as their culturally informed conception of persecution and fear as well as what is a good or credible story. Amongst the asylum seekers interviewed Edy in particular demonstrated confidence concerning his capacities to provide a convincing story which he attributes to his studies in linguistics. Having an intellectual background endowed Edy with the linguistic resources necessary to provide a compelling story considering my own linguistic background. Indeed it was relatively easy for me to understand his points in the narrative. In contrast Alex's narrative required from my part a stronger attention both during the listening and analysis process as I was not always sure to understand him. However unlike Edy, Alex did not explicitly reveal an awareness of the possible misunderstandings hence in his case it does not necessarily link to his perception of the outcome. Nevertheless the difference between the two asylum seekers illustrates differences with regards to narrative competence. Norbu on his side mentioned his fear of "funny questions" which he attributes to differences between Tibetan and Swiss notions of what elements are important to establish the truthfulness of the story. This includes for example the attention to details such as distances or the price of sugar. This points to conflicts between the administration's and the asylum seekers' conceptions of how coherence and credibility is established in a narrative. Norbu expresses his fear of such questions for if he cannot answer them the administration may not believe that he is Tibetan.

These examples demonstrate not only the variability of narrative competence but also point towards a certain form of inequality. In his study investigating narrative inequality Blommaert (2001) notes that asylum procedures require communicative resources that are often beyond reach of asylum seekers. Moreover asylum seekers' own way of making sense within their narrative often conflict with the expectations inscribed within the application procedure such as the criteria for truth, coherence and credibility. As my study did not include an analysis of the audition context it is not possible to make a specific link between the asylum seekers' way of narrating and how it is assessed in the administrative context. It is nonetheless interesting to note that some of the asylum seekers seemed conscious of the differences of narrative competence. Norbu on the one hand demonstrates an awareness of the vulnerability of his position as he has no control over the way in which his narrative is evaluated. Edy on the other hand draws confidence from the fact that he has the linguistic competence enabling him to provide a compelling narrative.

Considering the diversity of narrative competences and ways of expressing it is necessary for the listener to be aware of possible misunderstandings and to be able to adjust these. One way of achieving this is by providing space for negotiation. Such a space implies the possibility for the asylum seeker to participate in the struggle over the meaning of experience in order to have a say in what is understood and how his or her story is assessed (Eastmond, 2007). Legal case workers are

well aware of the diversity of ways of narrating and the necessary space for these narratives to emerge. During the interviews they highlighted elements which may generate imprecisions, influence the process of narration or emotional reactions. They notably include cultural differences, educational background, memory and even personal differences. They emphasise in that regard the necessity to be aware of these differences and to provide the possibility for asylum seekers to explain themselves.

However the legal caseworkers do not only highlight the space for negotiation but also the importance of the interactional context. They particularly emphasise the need to create a safe space and instil trust in order for the story to fully emerge. Indeed both of the legal case workers highlight that the asylum seekers do not always reveal all the elements at first. Hence it is not just a problem of negotiation over meaning but of the context of speech. What these interviews seems to point at is that individuals do not necessarily reveal their 'full selves' and that this depends on the context of interaction. When the person is aware of a strong power differential in the interaction this may prevent the full disclosure of their story. In the situation of the audition for example, asylum seekers are aware that the narrative they provide will be evaluated to determine whether they fulfil the criteria to be recognised as refugees. The lack of control over the way meaning in their story is assessed or the intimacy of certain experiences may prevent the full disclosure of their story. In this regard the legal case workers view their work as providing the necessary trust for the asylum seekers to bring their narrative forth. They do so notably by emphasising their independence from the administration, and the professional confidentiality – none of the information is divulged. They further emphasise the need for time to establish the necessary atmosphere of trust although both deplore the lack of time which would be necessary in many cases.

This issue of the interactional context highlighted by the legal caseworkers is closely related to the methodological question raised by qualitative researchers concerning access to stories. For a story to go beyond initial surface descriptions it is necessary to establish a safe space in which the interviewee is inclined to open up and reveal what is often deeply personal information. This requires sensitivity from the part of the researcher including an "ability to form an accepting relationship, skill in active listening, and focus on the other's experiential world" (D. E. Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 142). Moreover such methodological issues relating to the access of personal information are closely linked to ethical issues as both involve the interaction between individuals (Ryen, 2004). Such ethical issues pertain to the relationship established during the interaction as well as what is done with the material collected. If a safe space is necessary for accessing authentic and in depth narratives from individuals than discussions relating to the interactional context should also be present within the administration. Moreover the ethical issues underlining the interactional context

are even more acute in the context of the audition as the assessment of the individuals' speech result in decisions that have concrete effects on these individuals concerned. Asylum seekers are well aware of the impact the decisions may have on their future.

2.2.3 Lack of future projection

As has been highlighted, narratives reveal the future-oriented character of individuals (Atkins, 2004). Indeed the story projects the desired future of the person (Polletta & Chen, 2011). Moreover coherence and unity of the narrative is largely informed not only by the past but also by the individual's projection in the future. Drawing from Ricoeur, Eastmond has highlighted this directedness of narratives – their future resolution. Narratives “project experiences into the future, outlining strategies towards imagined ends” (Marita Eastmond, 1996, p. 247). This points towards the necessity of being able to project oneself in the future to have a sense of one's possibility to take action, even if this future is imaginary. So what happens to the narrative and the self when one's future is uncertain as revealed in the analysis? Indeed some of the asylum seekers, particularly Norbu and Alex, explicitly state the difficulty of not knowing the future, which is linked to the uncertainty of the outcome of the procedure. Norbu identifies waiting for an answer as the most difficult aspect of the procedure and his dependency on Switzerland's decision to establish his future. Alex also highlights the great strain imposed by the lack of knowledge of his future. Not being able to project in the future means that there is a lack of resolution in the individual's narrative of displacement. The liminal state imposed by the uncertainty of the asylum situation prevents individuals from taking agency and action in shaping their future. This does not mean that they cannot concretely engage in activities, but that the uncertainty makes it difficult to integrate them into a meaningful and coherent story as they lack purpose and aim. In this regard, Edy differs significantly from the other narratives as he is less concerned about the outcome of the decision. Indeed, he is not only confident of his capacities to find other means of staying in Europe, but he also does not consider his future as depending on the administration's decision. The future thus appears as less problematic in his narrative which contains a clear directionality and does not stop at the wait for a decision.

2.3 Questions of truth

Questions concerning truth came up in all of the narratives. Norbu, Paul and Alex were directly confronted to the way in which the administration regards stories as sources of proof. Edy and Umit on their side raised important issues by revealing their stance towards lying. Norbu highlighted the fear of not being believed to be Tibetan by the administration. Alex had to undergo a medical examination in a hospital to prove the physical consequences of the torture he endured, and thus justify his need for medical aid. Paul was asked to provide an arrest warrant which he identified as a

trick question. As a political prisoner he cannot request such a warrant in his country of origin. These three examples point towards the endemic suspicion inherent within the procedure which will be explored in a first part. Edy and Umit on their side highlighted how the inequity and framing of the procedure justifies lying as a means of self-preservation. This raises important questions concerning the way in which the administration conceives of truth within narratives, how they attempt to attain it and what kind of issues it generates for individuals. Such questions will be discussed in a second part.

2.3.1 Hermeneutic alertness and endemic suspicion

“The moment a hearer is made suspicious of the facts of a story or the ulterior motives of a narrator, he or she immediately becomes hermeneutically alert” (Bruner, 1991, p. 10). This is particularly the case for asylum seekers who are increasingly met by a climate of suspicion, in which they are perceived as taking advantage of the states’ hospitality (Fassin & d’Halluin, 2005). Several authors have highlighted the endemic suspicion of asylum seekers’ words which results in the focus on material proof, in particular those that are inscribed on the body (Aas, 2006; Ajana, 2010). The asylum seekers interviewed perceive this suspicion and depict the audition as a context in which the listeners are hermeneutically alert. This means that their narratives are met with great scrutiny, their words are questioned, challenged and often disqualified (Fassin & d’Halluin, 2005). This is well exemplified with the case of Norbu who fears he will not be believed to be Tibetan. The shift is slight, however we could argue that suspicion is stripping the meaning off asylum. Rather than an individual needing state protection there is a tendency to focus on asylum seekers as potential profiteer. The consequence is that the story is apprehended only as a means to access facts and no attention is given to the meaning individuals assign to their story.

2.3.2 What truth?

As highlighted by the legal caseworkers, the attention of the administration is particularly focused on material proof. When not available, the asylum seekers become entirely reliant on their story hence the hermeneutic alertness in the interaction with the administration is enhanced. The credibility and truthfulness of their narratives are assessed according to their words. The administration thus makes judgements concerning the truth of the story based on “inchoate ideas about the truth-telling” as all the information necessary to know whether an event is true can never be obtained (Macklin, 1998, p. 134). How the credibility determination is rendered is never fully transparent and contains an important subjective element. The legal caseworkers, who also need to make an evaluation of the story, mention what Adrienne calls the “human factor”, a certain feeling and intuition when assessing the credibility of the narrative. Moreover Adrienne also highlights the differences in the

emotional empathy induced by the stories they are confronted with. Although both refer to this aspect of demeanour they also warn against it as it can generate wrong judgements.

Noticing the necessarily subjective character of the credibility determination, Macklin warns against the presumption that there is an 'objective reality' out there which can be uncovered (1998). She argues that failing to articulate what directed a certain judgement with regards to credibility, and rejecting a story based on the lack of sufficient proof provided by the asylum seeker leads to decisions that appear as arbitrary. The perception of the arbitrariness of administrative decisions comes up particularly in two narratives. It appears in Edy's story when he recounts the discussion with his friends who tells him that it is "mostly people who don't deserve who get it and people who need it, mostly they don't get it." Umit also reveals a strong feeling of arbitrariness as he repeatedly asserts "it's not dependent on the case [...] there is a kind of discrimination in the Swiss system." Interestingly in both cases it is this arbitrariness that provides the justification or even a sense of necessity to lie in order to access what one rightly deserves. As Umit asserts: "the Swiss asylum system forces people to make a lie." This link between the perception of arbitrariness of the administrative procedure and lying puts into perspective the suspicion with which the asylum seekers are regarded by the administration. It suggests that one of the reasons asylum seekers divert from factual truth may be the lack of transparency with regards to the way in which credibility determinations are rendered. In order to avoid the arbitrariness Macklin suggests that the subjective character of a decision should not be avoided and rather lead to a full articulation of the grounds upon which a decision is made. Such evaluations require not only interrogating the asylum seeker but equally looking inwards at values, prejudices, orientation and "why we make certain judgements" (p. 140).

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

How do individuals engage in the process of narrating their life as asylum seekers? This initial question emerged from the observation that asylum seekers rely on their life story for two purposes. On the one hand their narrative serves to provide meaning to their experiences thereby contributing to the construction of a sense of self. On the other hand they are required to tell their story in the context of the asylum application in order to demonstrate and even prove that they are worthy of the refugee status. Departing from these observations this research set out to explore whether and how being an asylum seeker may frame an individuals' sense of self.

This central interrogation was tackled using the theoretical concept of narrative identity. The theory provides an ontological conception of individuals' selfhood as emerging from the narrative. By

arranging the disparate experiences of the past into a coherent order – a plot – a narrative provides meaning to the individual's life. It is a form of representation that enables to bring about conscious awareness of the self through the dynamic interplay between experience and narrative. The concept of narrative identity not only provided the theoretical lens but also the methodological approach to understand how individuals engage in meaning-making when recounting their experiences. The central question was thus broached first through an in-depth narrative analysis of the asylum seekers' life stories and second through an examination of their representation of asylum. In order to better understand the link between narration and the asylum framework the perspective of legal caseworkers was also included.

As epistemological material, narratives require to pay particular attention to the situational and interactional context in which they emerge. This includes the name 'asylum seeker' which is first an administrative label. Individuals asked to represent themselves as asylum seekers construct their narrative according to their understanding and experience of this label. Meaning and emphasis are notably shaped according to what they think the listener expects but also to what they identify as the purpose of the telling. In this regard the interview context must be distinguished from that of the audition. Focusing on specific aspects of narrative construction – plot, purpose, themes and self-presentation – this study enabled to draw certain observations on narration within the asylum framework from the perspective of the asylum seekers themselves. This perspective was enabled by the choice of an interview context which enabled to access elements of the narratives that are not revealed during the audition. The first observation is that as asylum seekers, the interviewees all geared their story towards an explanation of their departure. With regards to the plot they constructed stories using various combinations of themes relating to the socio-political context of their region of origin and their group of belonging. The departure was explained either in terms of events and their consequences or in terms of a particular evolution of the situation in their country of origin. One narrative differed (Umit) focusing rather on a life trajectory leading to a situation of impasse. In terms of the purpose of the telling a shift can be noted from narration to justification when the asylum seekers are aware of a conflict between their story and the requirements of the asylum procedure. Finally in terms of self-conception, four of the asylum seekers highlight their taking of action in the face of a political situation limiting their freedom. This taking of action explains the departure in Alex and Norbu's stories by leading to events of persecution or threat of persecution. Umit by contrast does not provide a story in which he takes political action, but rather presents a situation of impasse in which taking action would become threatening.

Looking more closely at the framework of asylum and how it may shape the process of narration a number of observations emerged from the analysis and the literature. These

observations were grouped according to three lines: the victimization of the asylum seeker, the perception of the outcome and questions of truth within the narrative. With regards to victimization, Alex's case illustrates particularly well the focus within the narrative on physical injuries, a tendency within refugee determination procedures that has already been observed by several authors (Fassin & d'Halluin, 2005; Marlowe, 2010; Shuman & Bohmer, 2004). The consequence of this focus on the physical weakness in Alex's case contributes to a sense of loss of purpose in life, as his capacity for action is neither acknowledged nor encouraged. His present thus lacking meaning he misses a viable directionality or possibility for a projection in the future, at least within his narrative.

The second set of observations is based on a comparison between the asylum seekers' perception of the outcome of their case. This section demonstrates that there are various levels of uncertainty and confidence relating to the outcome and that this has incidence on the individuals' possibility or capacity to project themselves in the future. Contributing to the level of uncertainty is the amount of knowledge concerning the procedure and the narrative competence of the asylum seekers. What these two aspects seem to point at is the necessity to provide an adequate space for negotiation in order for the story to emerge, a point emphasized by the legal caseworkers.

Finally questions concerning the apprehension of truth were discussed. The climate of suspicion with which asylum seekers' stories are apprehended generates a context of enhanced hermeneutic alertness. Indeed, one of the principal aims within the procedure is to uncover the truth within the narratives. However there is an overriding conception that an objective truth out there is discoverable and an overwhelming focus on factual truth. This generates assessments which avoid acknowledging the subjective character of human judgment in face of narratives. Drawing from this observation, Macklin argues that this leads to decisions that appear as arbitrary (1998). And indeed it is this perception of arbitrariness of the asylum procedure that leads two of the interviewees to defend a necessity to lie.

Coming back to the more conceptual questions raised in the introduction, the results of the research may lead to a small reflection on the selfhood of asylum seekers. The suggestion was to draw a parallel between the labelling of individuals as asylum seekers and the tragedy of the name. Names with which a person is confronted may not correspond to who he or she considers him/herself to be. Asylum seeker is such a name as it is an administrative category externally assigned, which additionally demands a life narrative from the individual. It bears with it not only a set of legal criteria, and of administrative exigencies but also a whole array of underlining conceptions of what a refugee experience should look like and how truth may be determined. It implies a process of interpretation by the administration to determine whether the individual's story fits the criteria of refugee and responds to an assessment of credibility. As highlighted by Briggs this

“process is embodied in discursive practices that greatly constrain how gaps and links may be created, what techniques are available to which participants, and who is able to imbue utterances with authority” (1997, p. 539). The tragedy of the name experienced by the asylum seekers interviewed is closely related to the dependency on the administration for a decision on their future and the great uncertainty in this regard. They have to provide a narrative justifying their departure; however the way in which they represent themselves and their experience will not necessarily be acknowledged. Moreover, as illustrated by Alex’s case, the demands of the procedure may require the asylum seeker to focus on aspects of his or her story that conflict with the reconstruction of a dignified sense of self. One narrative (Edy) however stands out as Edy does not regard himself as depending on the administrative decision, he proposes a story in which the future does not appear as problematic. He perceives to have the tools necessary to build this future independently from his recognition as a refugee. The tragedy of the name thus seems to appear when individuals are rendered vulnerable to the recognition by the authority, which holds the power to define them and determine their future.

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